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WHICH SHALL IT BE?

CHAPTER I.

"PULL down that blind, Miss Foster! Don't you see the light comes right across my eyes? but, indeed, if I did not attend to my own wants and comforts, I might want long enough!"

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Redman; I was so occupied with the paper I did not perceive it;" and Miss Foster rose eagerly to perform the old lady's behest.

The time was somewhere about 11 A.M.; the scene a small dining-room in one of those genteel modern houses which abound in the new district where polite Brompton melts into aristocratic South Kensington. Among the neat tenements and accurate front gardens of Abingdon Villas few equalled, none surpassed, No. 13, the abode of dignified and solid respectability incarnate, in the person of Mrs. Redman, relict of the late John Redman, of Corbet Court, City, and Bayham Hill, Camden Town, a substantial man who, after scraping together a good jointure for his wife, a fair portion for his elder daughter (the one who had married to please him), and a tolerable business for his only son, departed this life—having toiled much and enjoyed little—leaving, however, a name and reputation calculated to encourage others to tread in the same thorny road; and now the widow found Camden Town too low a place to spend her money in, so migrated to Brompton and the neighbourhood of her married daughter.

There had been another daughter, but her name was never heard, or at least heard only in the lowest whisper.

This fine sunny morning then MRS. Redman sat near her dining-room window; she was a large woman, but not a fleshy one—no, she gave the idea of much bone; she wore a dull, thick, black satin dress, made high and plain, the folds of a delicate white net handkerchief showing above it round the neck; she also wore a huge cap, the area of which was covered with a variety of quillings and plaitings, and bows of ribbon, till it became an edifice of formidable aspect and dimensions, yet not a

whit too big for the head it coveted; beneath it was a broad, cold, pale face, with a large jaw, thin lips, and eyes of no particular shape, hue, or expression at any time; but especially undecipherable at present, for her glasses were on her nose, slanting slightly to one side, as though to give her the advantage of double and single vision.

On a small table lay some netting, but her hands were crossed and quiet—small hands for her size, and wrinkled, as was natural at her age; but having a somewhat cruel look, from the muscular development and claw-like fingers.

Miss Foster, who was drawing down the blind, was a human of a very different type; a thin, wafery creature, in some drab nondescript of a morning dress and a black silk apron, with a kindly, weakly face that must once have had much beauty; now it was faded, the lines of care and trouble unsparingly drawn, the once bright eyes sunk, the nose risen into sharp prominence, the dark luxuriant curls reduced to a sausage-like roll at each side of the face, and—greatest change of all,—the radiant smile of happy girlhood dimmed, till scarce a ghost of it is to be found in the nervously ready smile of a much enduring companion.

Oh! relentless and mysterious law, which blindly and helplessly we obey, whence comes the curse which hangs on weakness, however innocent, and good, and tender? Here, on the threshold of another's history—in which Miss Foster, now drawing down Mrs. Redman's blind, has but little to do—would I fain turn aside to note the simple annals of her life, and trace the course of one of those everyday unrecognized tragedies—those almost hourly crushings-out of life's life, youth, joy, and hope, in the deadly combat between heart and circumstance.

The blind duly drawn down, Miss Foster returned to her task of reading aloud the police reports to her mistress, as Mrs. Redman emphatically was, much more than of the smart pink-ribboned housemaid, or the independent cook; and for some minutes Mrs. Redman listened with tranquillity; soon however she interrupted the lecture.

"Look to the right," she said; "there, to your right; just in the upper pane; there's a slit in my new muslin curtains, and this is only their second season. Now, how ever could Sarah put them up without seeing it, and telling me; but she no more cares for my property than—than anything," she added after a short mental search for a simile. "I wonder you did not notice it, Miss Foster; but you never see anything. I wonder what your eyes are for, I'm sure?"

"I am not very observant," acquiesced the companion; "but now you point it out, there is a large slit; dear me, yes! a very large slit."

"Just ring the bell, will you," returned Mrs. Redman; "I want to show it to Sarah, and also that side-board. I could write my name in the dust that's on it."

"In London, really," observed Miss Foster, in a deprecating tone, "as soon as a thing is dusted it is covered again."

"Well, then, it should be dusted again," said Mrs. Redman, sharply. "I'll trouble you to——but stop, who is that coming in at our front gate? Now, that gate ought not to be left unlocked, with all kinds of queer characters about. Look here, Miss Foster. What do you make of those odd-looking people? Walking up to the front door, too!"

Miss Foster started forward with her usual nervous readiness, but was too late to catch more than a glimpse of a little girl in a hat, before the pillar of the portico hid the visitors from view.

"Whatever can they want?" ejaculated Mrs. Redman, with that species of indignant apprehension common to dogs and men at the approach of a reduced fellow-creature.

"A man and a girl, shabby-looking, but not quite common—just the sort of people to come with a petition; and I'm sure, paying poor-rates to the amount that——"

Here a trim housemaid, in an exquisite and picturesque cap, a cotton dress rustling with starch, and a saucy apron, entered, holding a salver on which lay a card, which with an air of deference she presented to Mrs. Redman.

"Dear me, now what can this mean?" began her mistress. "Stay, Sarah." To Miss Foster: "Just look at this, will you?" and without ceasing to gaze on the morsel of pasteboard, she gave an impatient jerk with her elbow.

The card had evidently been bent by lying in a pocket instead of in a card-case; moreover, there was the impression of a human thumb on one end of it. Nevertheless, it bore in clear and beautifully formed characters the following inscription:—

> Mr. Warrene Fitzwarrenne,
>
> *The Corinthiane Theatre,*
>
> *Thames End.*

"Gracious goodness!" said Miss Foster, "who can that be?"

"I suppose they have been burnt out, or something, and are

getting up a subscription," returned Mrs. Redman. "Here, Sarah, take that card back, and say I never subscribe to anything not connected with the parish."

Sarah departed.

"But perhaps he doesn't want a subscription," timidly suggested Miss Foster.

"What does he want, then?" demanded Mrs. Redman, with much asperity; upon which Miss Foster subsided into her usual crushed condition.

Mr. Warrene Fitzwarrenne, however, was not to be so easily disposed of. Sarah returned with the salver still bearing the objectionable card.

"Please 'm, the gentleman says he only wishes a few moments' conversation, and——"

"Will not detain you long," interrupted a deep rolling voice, which sounded as though accustomed to "hurl maledictions," or "call down blessings" of the most telling description.

And Mr. Warrene Fitzwarrenne strode into the room.

He was by no means equal in dimensions to his voice, for he was somewhat below middle size, and the length of his stride was, to judge by appearance, rather inconvenient. He was tightly buttoned up in an overcoat of fashionable appearance, but terribly worn about the seams. His face, close shaved, had a blue mottled look about the chin, and though he strove hard to call up a look of grave determination, it was a kindly, simple, weather-beaten face.

One hand in a dark glove, showing glimpses of finger ends, held his hat, which had a crape on it, by a very weak rim, and the other drew after him a child of twelve or thirteen years of age, with shabby boots and coloured stockings, a dark stuff frock, a small black-and-white check shawl, a battered hat with a mangy black feather, and a pair of cotton gloves.

Under the hat Miss Foster descried a small, white, pasty, delicate-looking face, with great eyes, red with crying, a mass of pale dull yellow hair, rough, untidy, and hopeless-looking. She entered awkwardly, half resisting the force with which her conductor dragged her into the centre of the room, where they stood the antipodes of all that surrounded them. The bright grate, the polished furniture, the snowy curtains, the sweet hyacinths in their coloured glasses, the neat servant, the indescribable atmosphere of order, care, respectability contrasted with the shabby, threadbare, scrambling vagabondism.

"Will not detain you long," said Mr. Fitzwarrenne, as he strode into the room and confronted Mrs. Redman, who, with a sort of gasp as if for breath, made an ineffectual clutch at Miss Foster's garments.

"Madam," continued the intruder, letting go his charge, that he might the better gesticulate, placing himself in attitude, and sending his sentences well home, with emphatic pointings of the forefinger. "Madam, I have a tale to unfold which—permit your domestic to retire."

"No, I won't!" said Mrs. Redman, angry, yet frightened. "Say your business at once, or I'll send for the police. Sarah, don't attempt to go."

"As you will, madam," returned Mr. Fitzwarrenne. "Then, in brief, my business is this, to place under your matronly protection, your maternal care, this dear child, your orphan granddaughter, Madeline Digby;" and he drew the shrinking girl towards the representation of respectability, who seemed on the point of a collapse.

"Miss Foster, why don't you turn them out, or do something?" cried the terrified, infuriated Mrs. Redman. "How can you sit there and see me imposed upon? I have no granddaughter of that name. I have washed my hands of Captain Digby, and all connected with him, years ago, and I never permit his name to be mentioned before me; he has done me ill enough, and I do not believe this creature is my daughter's child—my unfortunate daughter's infant must have died fifteen years ago;—when she did. You'll not find it so easy to impose upon me. Leave the house, sir. How dare you come here to insult me, talking of that—that wretch who——"

"Hush, madam," returned Mr. Fitzwarrenne, with a touch of feeling, which lent him dignity for a moment. "My poor comrade will never offend in this world again; he is gone to be judged by a different code from ours."

"Dead? Is he dead? and yet he must have been quite a young man," said Mrs. Redman, somewhat eagerly—a touch of selfish curiosity relaxed her settled wrath.

"Sarah, you may go down-stairs," she added, suddenly noticing that fair functionary standing open-mouthed, eager for further revelations; but she was compelled to retreat.

"Yes, madam, ten days since we laid one of the truest-hearted fellows in his last resting-place; and some hours before the final struggle, he took this little hand" (taking the girl's) "laid it in mine, and said, 'Kit'—he used that friendly abbreviation—"Kit, this is all that holds me to life, yet she will be better off when I am gone. Take her to her grandmother, Mrs. Redman,—she will not refuse food and shelter to her child's child.' He also gave me this packet," unbuttoning his coat rapidly, and in his hurry pulling out a ragged pocket-lining, as well as a small bundle of papers, "which contains, no doubt, the verification

of my tale. I there solemnly promised to place the orphan under your protection; and to it I now consign her."

He drew himself up, and made as though to retire.

"Stop, stop!" cried Mrs. Redman, "do not suppose you are to have it all your own way, and saddle me with the cost of a girl to clothe and feed. Why should that man, Digby, leave his child unprovided for on my hands? What right has he to suppose I would do anything for her?"

"Oh, Kit! dear kind Kit," cried the pale child, speaking for the first time through an agony of sobs, and clutching his arm, "don't leave me here; let me stay with you and Mrs. Fitzwarrenne, and I will do anything. I'll wheel the perambulator, and take care of Aurora and Margaretta, I will; and I can go on in the pantomimes, and earn something in that way. Oh, don't leave me with this old lady! I'll die, Kit dear, if you do!"

There was a wonderful pathos and sweetness in her tones, and a suppressed passion in her pleading which touched the tender heart of Miss Foster, and brought tears to her eyes. Something in her voice, too, disturbed Mrs. Redman; she fidgeted in her seat, and looked more sour than ever.

"Some one will be coming in," she said, angrily, "and a strange appearance it will have—people like you here. I'll do nothing, and promise nothing, till I consult with my son, Mr. John Redman. Here, leave the papers, and your address. I'll have the matter severely examined;" and Mrs. Redman sank back, holding the yellow packet as though she feared it.

"Dear, dear, I feel quite upset," she exclaimed, as her companion returned, after seeing the intruders safe out, "to have such a couple walking up to my front door as if they were the best in all London, and Mrs. Nettlethorpe in her front parlour window, I'll be bound, making all sorts of remarks, and I that have been in the highest respectability all my life; it's enough to give me a brain fever, it is, and you no more care nor think about it than if I was a stone. I'm sure I often wish I was. Go down to the cook, Miss Foster, do, and tell her to make me a cup of arrowroot and put a glass of port wine in it. I am quite exhausted. And, Miss Foster, write to Mr. John Redman immediately, and tell him he must come round this evening; and just put on your bonnet and ask Mrs. Comerford to step this way."

And a family council was held that evening at No. 13, Abingdon Villas, not perhaps of the same lofty and historical description as many that figure in the chronicles of noble races, but to do the councillors justice, conducted on principles as hard and selfish, as narrow as if the worldly success of some aristocratic

family, or the interests of some struggling nation, depended upon it.

Mrs. Comerford arrived in time for tea and sallylun, and was met in the hall by Miss Foster, who came forth timidly from the dining-room, carefully shutting the door after her.

Mrs. Comerford was good-natured in a condescending patronizing surface way to her mother's companion. She was always afraid the old lady would leave her money from Mrs. Comerford's darling children, and so was invariably studying mother's ways, and her mother's cat's ways, and ever doing the civil to the insignificant companion—a line of conduct which brought much snubbing on her devoted head.

"Dear, dear," said Miss Foster, "I am so glad you are come, Mrs. Comerford. Would you not like to step up to your mamma's room, just to straighten your hair, and put on your cap. I'm sure dear Mrs. Redman has been in that state ever since the shocking upset she got this morning, that I scarcely know what to do with her. She can't bear you to clear your throat, or step across the room, and she didn't eat two bits at dinner. It's true she had two large cupfuls of arrowroot and port wine, and three Abernethy biscuits before, but what's that?"

"What indeed!" echoed Mrs. Comerford with true pathos.

"Isn't it awful?" resumed the sympathetic Miss Foster. "I never had such a turn, at least of late years, as when that man —oh, such a desperate looking man, Mrs. Comerford—walked into the room." [Poor Warrene Fitzwarrenne would have been highly flattered could he have heard this tribute to his dramatic powers.]

"And the girl, my dear?" asked Mrs. Comerford, somewhat anxiously, "what did dear grandmamma seem to think of her?"

"Well I hardly know. She didn't seem to mind her at all; and she was not a very nice looking child. She had a lot of rough wild whitish hair, and big dark eyes; but I must say I never heard a sweeter voice."

"Dear me, had she," said Mrs. Comerford uneasily, "why that is like her mother, if—I mean—she is my sister's child."

"Hadn't we better go down?" said Miss Foster nervously. "Your dear mamma may fancy——, eh?"

"Yes, certainly," returned Mrs. Comerford uneasily, fully comprehending the unspoken fear.

"I thought you were coming down," said Mrs. Redman testily, as her daughter and Miss Foster entered, allowing the former to take her straight cold hand (kissing was considered humbug by Mrs. Redman). "I wonder you didn't come over earlier when you knew what a shock I had received; but I don't

know what would put you out of your way. Some people think of self first, but it's of no consequence."

"My dear mother," exclaimed Mrs. Comerford eagerly, "Bobby had a queer sort of a rash out all over his neck and arms, so I sent for Dr. Fenton, and he never came till about an hour ago. He says it is only a nettle rash, so he sent a bottle, a third part to be taken every four hours, and I just waited to give him the first dose. I'll be home for the second. It smells a little like vinegar, and honey, and camphor, and rhubarb, not at all nice, and we had such a business to make the dear boy take it—he is wonderfully sensible—or I would have been here an hour ago, I'm sure."

"Well, well, never mind," returned the mother. "Is the tea made, Miss Foster? I'm just wearying for a cup. I've not been able to take a mouthful since—since that visitation. Only think, after resting for fifteen years (it's near fifteen years, isn't it, since I sent that man twenty pounds?) in peace, to be attacked in this way. I'm sure no one can say I've not sacrificed myself to my children. You know I offered to provide for Mary if she would leave that man—a poor wretch that dragged her into misery. I'm sure I wish your brother would come."

It was remarkable that when Mrs. Redman was in one of those peculiar conditions called by the initiated "upset," she had no relative of any kind; it was "your brother," not "my son;" "your children," not "my grandchildren." However, the wished-for individual made his appearance before the meal was quite finished.

Mr. John Redman was a person of great importance in his own estimation, and that of his family. He was a portly man, with a rather handsome aquiline face and thick dark brown hair, accurately parted to one side, and brought in a graceful wave over to the other. He was a well-shaven, well-dressed man, with exquisitely got up linen, neat boots, and a diamond ring—a sort of cross between the Club and the City man—who piqued himself upon his knowledge of life. He was greatly respected by his mother, and was, perhaps, the only thing she loved, probably because he was the only thing she dared not snub. Mr. John Redman flattered himself he was quite the gentleman; nevertheless, there was no one who more humiliated poor Miss Foster than this strong, rich, successful man.

He was never quite sure of her name, or that she was in the room, or that he had spoken to her. Yet this was all unintentional. And what business had a poor thing, only a companion, who gave so much for what she got, hours of reading aloud, all her personal liberty, a lifetime of patient endurance, for thirty pounds and her keep, to look for recognition? How much

more independent, and rich, and dignified was Mary the cook on twenty pounds and all found, with Christmas gifts, and the disposal of the kitchen stuff!

Mr. John Redman entered with his usual sedate composure; hoped his mother was well, with the politeness which rather awed that venerable matron; said, "How do, Susan?" to his sister; then sitting down, suddenly remembered Miss Foster, and exclaimed, "Oh, and how'r you?" evidently not expecting a reply.

"Have some tea, John?" said Mrs. Redman.

"Well, not if it has gone the rounds," he replied, drawing out a perfumed handkerchief, and wiping his brow.

"Make some fresh tea, Miss Foster," ordered his mother.

That done, and Miss Foster rewarded by the measured remark, "Not bad," as the great man sipped it, Mr. John Redman looked at his watch. "Ah! I've not more than half-an-hour to give you, mother. I am to dine with Scrimager, of Grimes & Co., at 7.30, so perhaps Miss—a—a—will just—just——"

"Tell Sarah to take away tea," said Mrs. Redman; "and you needn't come back, Miss Foster."

"Very well," returned that lady, simpering. "Can I settle your cushion, and give you your netting before I go?" she added, playfully, for a ghost of old coquetry always rose up when Mr. John Redman was present, and a word or two of civil notice from him would make her girlish for a fortnight.

"No, no; I don't want nothing," said her amiable patroness, crowding her negatives in her hurry, and the family conclave was left to its discussion.

Mr. Comerford—or papa, as Mrs. Comerford called him—was not admitted: indeed, his was not a prominent position, and perhaps in calling him "papa" Mrs. Comerford hit his most distinguishing characteristic.

"This is an awkward business for you, ma'am," began Mr. John, turning himself on his chair, and throwing his arm over the back of it; "let me hear it fairly, for your note told little."

Whereupon Mrs. Redman recapitulated the event with which our story opens, interrupted by ejaculations from Mrs. Comerford.

"Well, the first point to be ascertained," said the man of business, "is this—are we sure the girl is the *bonâ fide* child of my unfortunate sister. Let me see these papers;" and he turned over the contents of the packet left by Fitzwarrenne with Mrs. Redman. "Hum!—'Certificate of baptism, Liverpool. Madeline Digby, child—Arthur Digby, Mary his wife, &c., &c.' So far, so good."

"They might all be forged, you know," said Mrs. Redman.

"Or this girl might be the child of some other woman than our unfortunate sister," observed Mrs. Comerford.

"Yes! it would be a pretty business if I was to clothe, and feed, and educate the child of some vile woman," added Mrs. Redman.

"The story must be carefully inquired into; but should the girl prove to be my sister's child, ma'am, you must not let her come upon the parish."

"I'm sure I never knew such a thing, never," observed Mrs. Redman, in piteous accents.

"Nor I, never," echoed Mrs. Comerford.

"And what would you have me do?" asked the mother.

"Oh! having ascertained the genuineness of those documents, educate and clothe her; give her the chance of earning her own bread. That she has a right to expect. If she doesn't choose to do so afterwards, then you may wash your hands of her."

"Dear, dear, but what a lot of money it will cost!"

"The first expense is the whole, perhaps," remarked Mr. Redman, "and may save some loss of character."

"Well, it is hard," said his mother, bitterly, "to have to spend my money for that Digby's child; what we never had to do for you, John—or your children, Susan."

"No, indeed!" ejaculated the latter.

"It is hard," acquiesced the son, heartily; "but I don't see how it can be helped; but"— rising and pacing the room, his hands in his pockets, and an evident inward struggle going on —"I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll contribute twenty pounds per annum for the next two years, and we'll see what comes of it; she may not be the person she is represented to be. You have seen the child. What do you think, yourself, ma'am?"

"Well, I'm sure, John, your offer is handsome, and I'm obliged to you. It would be hard on me if all was to come out of my pocket."

"Well, she has no claim on me," said Mr. John, rather hastily, "but what is she like?"

"Well, she has a lot of light hair, something like your poor sister's, and her voice startled me a little, but then she has sort of black eyes, and does not look over twelve or thirteen, and according to that certificate she must be fifteen."

"Nevertheless, I am inclined to think she is your grandchild. However, we must be prudent. So I'll just put the matter in the hands of Harridge and Blyth; they are first-rate men, and close as the grave. I fancy they have some curious secrets in their keeping, and in a day or two it will be cleared up, one way or other."

"Then would you have me take her home to live here in this house?" said Mrs. Redman, querulously looking round on her exquisitely neat apartment as though it was about to be desecrated by the ingress of a young Bohemian like her possible grandchild.

"No," returned her son, soothingly; "couldn't you put her to some school, and fit her to go out as a teacher? You needn't have her before you always."

"No, I couldn't, you know," said the old lady, in her sharpest key. "Whatever would Mrs. Nettlethorp, and Miss Wilkins, and Mrs. Parkins say, they that have no notion that I ever had another daughter except Susan, or if I had, that she died young. Why if a granddaughter appeared here, they'd think things even worse than they are."

"Oh, she need never come here," interposed Mrs. Comerford; "for a trifle more pay any school would keep her through the holidays."

"I do hate to hear you run on so, Susan," said her mother, with the utmost contempt. "You're sure to talk nonsense. Where is the trifle more of pay to come from I'd like to know? I'm sure I'll be stripped of everything."

"Don't begin to quarrel before you know if you have any cause," remonstrated Mr. Redman, calmly superior; "the child may be an impostor, and until this point is cleared up any arrangement is premature. Now my time is up, I must say good evening."

CHAPTER II.

THE result of inquiries was so far satisfactory that Mr. Redman, his mother, and Mrs. Comerford, who, for certain reasons, was much the most difficult to be convinced, all agreed that it would be much better to silence all gossip and possible slander by taking the orphan of the sinning and defunct ex-captain under their respectable protection, and placing her at a school. "Not that I expect much to come of it," grumbled Mrs. Redman; "her poor mother was so weak and fanciful, I'm sure she was not like a child of mine; nor was it like one of us to be caught by the smooth tongue of that scamp Digby, with his airs about being a cavalry officer, and a man of family; so the child will be a poor thing, I expect. I shall never forget his impudence, coming to ask Mr. Redman's consent, and then his coaxing my daughter to run away; and, dear, dear, the worry and grief I went through! and after, when they got from bad

to worse, I was always steady to my principles, and never would see her."

However, having made up her mind, Mrs. Redman set to work in the most prudent and economical manner.

Miss Foster was worked pretty hard, a certain sum being given her out of which she was expected to find dresses, and hats, boots and necessaries to no end, and she did wonders. Shopping was a grand delight, and perhaps the only heart that felt a shade of real interest in the motherless child was the half-starved one that beat weakly in the companion's bosom. How often Miss Foster came to grief for not extracting thirty shillings' worth out of a sovereign, and how often she was sent to change sundry articles, and match impossible bits of old merino and crape which Mrs. Redman rummaged out of her multifarious stores, it boots not to tell.

Finally, about a fortnight after the opening of our tale, the unwearying Miss Foster was sent to the Fenchurch Street Station to meet the waif for whose transit a post-office order had been despatched to the benevolent Fitzwarrenne, with much trepidation on the part of Mrs. Redman, who anticipated fearful misapplications.

Poor Miss Foster was rather enlivened by so much unusual activity, and awaited the arrival of the train with some interest. She soon recognised the fair-haired, dark-eyed child, and taking her hand with irrepressible kindness (Mrs. Redman being safe at Brompton)—

"Your grandmamma has sent me to meet you, my dear, and I have some nice clothes for you at an hotel close by."

"I'm glad you have come for me," replied the little girl, with a smile so infantine in its sweetness, and shewing such pearly teeth, that Miss Foster was startled into believing that she might possibly turn out pretty, and with an unconscious emphasis that had made Miss Foster her friend for ever.

"Have you any luggage?" asked Miss Foster. "I suppose not."

"Oh, yes, I have," said Madeline, "a box under the seat of the carriage, this—this gentleman," she continued, colouring and pointing to a red-faced jolly-looking man, "was so good as to take care of it for me."

"Here you are, little one," replied the stout man, tugging at an obdurate square box, a disreputable looking box, covered with coloured paper much torn, and tied with an old cord much knotted. "Glad to see her in your care, marm," he continued to Miss Foster; "the poor thing cried fit to break her heart, nigh all the way. Good-bye, my little lass, and good luck to you," and he resigned the box to a porter.

"Dear, dear, you must not cry," remonstrated Miss Foster as

though she had been talking to a child. You are going to school, and will learn all sorts of nice things."

"I am glad to go to school," replied Madeline, in the sweet, low-toned, composed voice, which sounded wonderfully old for her childlike stature, with an accent refined beyond what her appearance would lead you to expect, but yet with a musical ring in it not quite English.

"Come, we must go to an hotel close by, where you can have some dinner, and change your things. You must have a black dress, you know, and— But don't cry, we are only losing time. Here, my good man, please to bring the box this way." And taking her charge's hand, Miss Foster somewhat fussily led her to the entrance, and calling a cab, they drove a few streets off to a quiet hotel, recommended by Mr. Redman, where it was decided in the family council the little outcast should be clothed and fed, and generally made presentable previous to being delivered to the inspection of Miss Jones, the principal of that well-known educational establishment, Springfield House, Clapham.

This, after much deliberation, had been agreed to, as Mrs. Redman rigidly resolved not to permit "that disgraceful-looking creature who calls herself my granddaughter," to appear within the sacred precincts of her temple of respectability, till some months' discipline and dressing had made her fit to pass current through the searching ordeal of Brompton criticism.

The house to which Miss Foster led her charge was one of those old-fashioned nooks of which experienced City men alone know the renown. The rooms were dark and stuffy—but the ale was irreproachable; the lower panes of the windows were principally of ground glass, but then the upper ones disclosed dusky brick walls, seemingly but a few inches distant, so the ground glass was decidedly an improvement. Here in a dingy bedroom little Madeline was introduced to the contents of a highly respectable portmanteau and bonnet box, and it must be confessed her eyes sparkled through the lately shed tears, as she inspected a common, and a better black dress, of inexpensive materials 'tis true, but neatly made, and a marvellous fit, considering it was the result of Miss Foster's guess work and dim remembrance of the orphan's proportions. There were under garments, too, and a hat and a bonnet, and a bootmaker close by brought an assortment of "bottines" to try on. Then succeeded the less gratifying operation of opening the Thames End importation—the mangy paper-covered box aforesaid.

A strange assortment of odds and ends was thereby disclosed; ragged skirts and dusty jackets, several tattered play books, ends of ribbon, and some parcels of old letters, yellow and faded.

"I do not know what they are," said Madeline, the eyes again

welling over; "but papa always kept them, and so I shall until I am old enough to know what to do with them."

There was a Bible and a prayer-book, a silver snuff-box, a pair of long cavalry spurs, the portrait of a handsome young cavalry officer, with eyes like Madeline's, and a sweet, irresolute mouth. This, the spurs, and the letters, Madeline resolutely insisted on transferring to her new and elegant portmanteau.

"It is all I have left of my own dear papa," she said, "fo Kit was so good I couldn't help leaving him the violin papa used to play on so beautifully. Ah! he did everything well, and yet how unhappy he was!" and the tears flowed afresh.

"Well, my dear, keep them; I am sure your grandmamma would not object," said Miss Foster in a soothing tone, determined that the redoubted grandmamma should know nothing about the matter. "And now dry your eyes and try to be composed, for Mr. John Redman (your uncle, you know) said he would be here about two, and I want you to look well in your nice new things, if it was only to show your gratitude, you know."

"Yes," said Madeline, dreamily; "I ought to be very grateful. What a quantity of money all these things must have cost! and I am so fond of pretty things—nice neat, clean things. Oh! yes, I ought to be very grateful! Shall I see my—my grandmamma to-day?"

"No, my dear; she thinks it best for you to go to school at once."

"I wonder she would not like to see me in my new clothes," said Madeline simply.

Miss Foster made no reply; but led the way down-stairs to a crooked strip of a room, where a serene waiter was laying a table in obedience to the imperious mandates of Mr. John, who, in *propria persona*, was directing the arrangement of a midday meal —a cold sirloin of beef and pickles, a monstrous cheese in that exquisite condition of moistness and mellowness only to be found in old-fashioned hotels, or rather inns, and a foaming jug of ale. Mr. John was no glutton, yet he always seemed to find that any excuse for extra eating produced an exhilarating effect. It was, therefore, with a fair degree of cordiality he advanced to meet his guests: "How do you do, Miss—a—? here, you waiter, don't forget the pulled bread; it's half the battle; and how are you, Miss—what's your name?"

"Madeline Digby." The tone was so sad, so soft, yet so composed, that Mr. John felt in some strange and indescribable manner stopped, and as it were gently slipped from an elevated position. The sensation of course was but momentary; a flashing composite thought, in which were mingled the consciousness of his own free and easy condition, diamond ring, balance at his

bankers', and elegant toilet, compared with the helplessness of the little outcast before him, quickly corrected these strange vagaries of his imagination which usually troubled him so little; but he looked with closer attention at the speaker. She seemed scarce tall enough for twelve, yet there was nothing stunted in the figure; though her frock sat loosely, it could not hide the graceful slope of the shoulders, the peculiar deer-like setting on of the small classic head, the shape of which was clearly shown as the luxuriant pale hair was simply parted and drawn to the back, where it was looped in thick plaits; the face was too colourless to be pretty, nor had it any regularity of feature to recommend it either, yet the strong contrast of the large dark-lashed eyes with her light hair, and a certain harmony of expression, gave it an attraction to any one who looked twice.

Of course Mr. John thought and saw all this in a tithe of the time my clumsy pen can write it; albeit not a very deep observer, he was dimly flattered by the sort of vague distinction which he felt, rather than recognised, pervaded the form and movements of his niece; so he held out his hand in his most patronising manner. "Shake hands then; you know I am your uncle;" a fact which he stated in much the same tone of unspeakable condescension in which my Lord Crœsus, in bran new broad-cloth, confesses himself a miserable sinner in the same category with poor Jack and Betty of the workhouse. "Come, let us see how much beef and pickles you can stow away. Sit down, Miss—a—Foster, you're looking quite blooming after all your work; 'pon my word, you've turned this young 'un out first-rate; ain't you a lucky girl to find such friends?"

"Mrs. Redman, and you too, have been very good to me," said Madeline earnestly, raising her large eyes to her uncle. Something in the tone and manner again struck him, and he asked rather abruptly: "How old are you?"

"I was fifteen last April," she replied.

"She is very small of her age," observed Mr. John to Miss Foster; "she looks a mere child."

"Papa used to say I never was a child," said Madeline.

"Ahem!" returned Mr. John, sternly coughing down the mention of the defunct delinquent. "Well, there's some cold beef and bread and butter, and, Miss Foster, give her some pickles."

"No, thank you; I cannot eat pickles."

"No! Why—how's that? not used to 'em, I suppose—never mind—take what you like. Miss Foster, let me help you. This is a prime piece of sirloin; I'll stick to the cheese and ale; I know the Falcon cheese and ale of old. Now then, little 'un, you are not eating your bread and butter."

"Thank you, I do not care; the butter is not quite fresh, I think."

"Oh, you are a little epicure, are you?" said Mr. John, feeling a half indignant surprise that a pauper like little Madeline should refuse victuals of any kind.

"No, indeed, I am not," she returned, evidently understanding him; "but it does not in the least matter."

"How is Mrs. Redman this morning?" asked her son, in the interval of crunching pulled bread.

"Well, pretty well, though rather nervous and flurried when I came away—so frightened lest I should be late to meet the train, that I was near an hour too soon."

"Ladies are all alike," said the jocular John; "an hour too soon, or an hour too late: and you take her (nodding at Madeline Digby) straight on to Miss What's-her-name?"

"Yes; we are to be there in time for tea at five o'clock, so perhaps we had better think of moving."

"Oh, you've lots of time yet. And I suppose you've settled all about her holidays? You know my mother mustn't be worried in any way—at any rate she won't let herself?"

"Oh, no. The Misses Jones have agreed, for a trifling additional sum on account of board, to keep Miss Digby through the holidays."

"I don't know what you call trifling, but it must be a precious small sum my mother would apply that term to," said Mr. John with a loud laugh. "You must complain to me if they starve you, remember, my little girl," he added, with a rough sort of kindness, to which Madeline, though wounded at the tone employed, which was of the kind that rich men employ to poor things, who should receive any jagged edges of good nature with grateful alacrity, replied by as bright a smile as she could muster.

She had wonderful tact, this young waif; she saw the man meant well, and she had a dim notion that she would make him her friend.

"And is Mrs. Redman really my mother's mother," she ventured to ask at last, "and you really my uncle?"

"Yes, my dear," returned Mr. John seriously, thinking she was overpowered by the nearness of such grandeur, "we do stand in that relationship to you; and I trust," he continued, with an air of deep morality, "you will take care to be a credit to us, and never do anything to disgrace us."

"Who?—me? Oh no! Why should I?" returned Madeline.

"I think, then, I have stayed as long as I can," said Mr. Redman. "I shall ring for the bill," and he made as if to rise.

"Let me," said Madeline, anticipating him with a sort of well-bred politeness, which was strikingly free from servility.

"Well, my dear," said Miss Foster, "I think we had better start too; there is no use in staying here, and the sooner you are settled at Miss Jones's the better."

"Then I shall say good-bye, and there are five shillings for pocket money," said Uncle John, taking out two half-crowns from a plethoric purse.

"Oh no," said Madeline, shrinking and blushing; "I ought not to have it; you have done so much; and see, I have half-a-sovereign Mr. Crump said was due to papa, and gave me this morning."

"And who is Mr. Crump?"

"Oh, our manager; he has been so good."

"Pray don't mention such people, my dear," said Miss Foster in a flurry.

"But he was very good," said Madeline earnestly.

"Well, good-bye to you," interrupted Mr. John; "I must be off."

An hour after, and a cab bearing a smart black portmanteau, and a tin bonnet box, drew up at the door of Springfield House. This edifice was of stout, old-fashioned red brick, and stood back from the road, rather near the common, on the level as you drove from town. There was a gravel sweep and some trees before it, and an extra-sized plate on the door, indicating the educational establishment of the Misses Jones. Within, a wide hall led through the house, and a glass door opposite the entrance showed neatly kept grounds and large trees at the back. On the right was the school-room; on the left, the dining-room, the drawing-room, and a study, where eminent professors of special branches of education taught the select few whose parents chose to pay for exceptional advantages. Up-stairs was Miss Jones's private sitting-room, and larger bed-room accommodation than is usually found in such establishments.

It was the hour of repose. The work of the day was almost over, and the twenty-seven young ladies of irreproachable parentage and careful training were nearly all dispersed in their various dormitories, smoothing their hair, and making some sort of toilet previous to the evening meal of tea. After which, some preparation of to-morrow's tasks, needle-work, and "recreation," as a nondescript species of employment—letter-writing, reading, crochet, or talking—was denominated, closed the day.

The long narrow table was laid with the requisites for tea. Large piles of bread and butter, the latter most delicately laid on, diversified the centre, garnished also by some dishes of water-cresses. A tea equipage occupied either extremity.

The only persons in the room were the English and French governesses, who with a governess-pupil, and the two Miss

Joneses themselves, formed the resident staff. Mademoiselle Delplanque was occupied in arranging some flowers in an unmanageable vase—one of those jagged-topped articles to be seen in the baskets of itinerant vendors, at Ramsgate and Margate. The English governess was standing in the window, with an elaborate piece of rather brown tatting in her hand.

"*Tenez!*" said mademoiselle, after a long silence for her. "It is impossible! Nothing can arrange itself in such a monster as this."

"A finger-glass would have done better," returned Miss Gunston. "There is no time to change it now before tea."

"Then I will change myself, and sit so as not to see it," rejoined the Frenchwoman, laughing. "Such a failure will spoil my tea."

"The new pupil has arrived," said Miss Gunston. "The cab was at the door when you came in, and now the lady who accompanied her has just come out."

"Eh!" exclaimed the other, joining her at the window, to see the back of the cab as it passed through the gate. "*Ma foi!* what luck the respectable Meeses our principals always find! 'Tis scarce a vacancy occurred, and see, it is filled up. Listen, my friend. If, when the whole twenty-eight were in place, they had another application, would their limit be inflexible, eh?"

"That's neither your affair nor mine," replied the prudent Englishwoman. "As they always keep their number up so successfully, it is to be supposed they sometimes reject applications."

"And this demoiselle, is she a paying pupil or——"

"Oh yes. At first she is to be on the regular footing, but afterwards, when Miss Moorcroft goes, and she is a little forward, she is to be governess in her place, though I fancy she belongs to rich people."

"Poor child!" ejaculated the Frenchwoman.

A world of experience and anticipation lay in the expression. A warning "Hush" from Miss Gunston stopped further remark, for a couple of young ladies had strolled into the room. Almost immediately the bell for tea resounded through the house, and pupils flocked at the summons like hungry chickens, the mere idea of allowance (though a fair one at Springfield House) acting, as usual, as a keen whetstone for appetite.

The twenty-seven pupils and the three teachers were all assembled when Miss Jones, who usually left the five o'clock tea to the presidency of Miss Gunston, entered, escorting, according to custom, the new-comer, Madeline Digby, whose aspect was composed but somewhat sad.

"I have brought you a new companion, young ladies," she

said (this was the usual formula), whom you will, I hope, make at home as soon as possible. Miss Gunston, Mademoiselle Delplanque—here is an additional charge for your kind care, and I trust, by God's assistance, an additional pleasure." To Madeline: "Here, my dear, take your place between Miss Moorcroft and mademoiselle. This is the station of a new arrival. I have no doubt that in a few days you will find yourself familiar and at your ease."

"Thank you," murmured Madeline, and Miss Jones departed to join her sister in the tea and toast which solaced this hour of repose after the fatigues of the day.

Madeline glanced round at her future companions. It was an average collection of faces. Fat girls, with turned-up noses and heavy jaws; thin, sharp girls, with small eyes and narrow mouths; good-natured faces, cranky faces, attractive, repellant; but those which especially fixed her attention were the countenances of the English governess, who sat at the other end of the table, and of Mademoiselle Delplanque and Miss Moorcroft, between whom she was placed.

The first was a light-haired, long-nosed, and firm-lipped Englishwoman of a certain age, reliable probably, but unsympathetic, to which latter quality, no doubt, was due the remarkable amount of authority she exercised in the school.

Mademoiselle Delplanque was the regular type of a Parisian imported for London schools; black-haired, black-eyed, a rather broad face and high cheek bones; the mouth wide, a little vulgar perhaps, but good-natured, with a suspicion of moustaches; the figure bony and difficult, yet dressed into a certain grace, albeit the material of the toilette was inexpensive enough.

Finally, Miss Moorcroft, not much older than herself seemingly, a thorough English girl of the middle class, with abundant nut-brown hair, a soft pink and white complexion, and kindly honest brown eyes. She had on a neatly-made grey alpaca dress, with scrupulously white linen collar and cuffs, and a black silk apron; she looked the perfection of tidiness, and indeed prettiness, the very girl to make a model wife for the rising man of middle station. Madeline's heart warmed to her at once.

Tea proceeded rather silently, as all English conversation was prohibited. Mademoiselle occasionally indeed broke out into scraps of talk, and Miss Moorcroft whispered kindly questions "If Madeline took sugar? if she would have more bread and butter?" &c.

Poor Madeline felt greatly bewildered; she did not understand a word of French, and a tone of submission to authority pervaded the little assemblage, which, quiet as she was by nature, oppressed the young Bohemian, hitherto accustomed only to the

unbridled liberty of a vagrant life; so she kept very still and watchful, and strove to understand it all, and her own position. She thought mademoiselle ate rather greedily, and she suspected a fat and thin girl who sat opposite of pinching each other under the table. At last Miss Gunston rose and pronounced a rather lengthy grace. Immediately all the young ladies rose too, with the alacrity of released creatures, and flocked towards the garden, except one culprit, who was in punishment, and obliged to write out a long exercise in the school-room.

"Come along with me, I will show you all about the garden and everything," said a dumpy, pasty-faced girl of about sixteen, passing her arm through Madeline's. "I have no friend now. Julia Tomkins and me used to be great chums—that girl with the coarse red hair fastening her bootlace. Law! did you ever see such legs! But she is such a tell-tale, I couldn't bear her any longer. I know she told Miss Gunston how I got Mary, the under housemaid, to fetch me some tarts and cheese-cakes after we were in bed one night. My name is Mary Anne Summers, what's yours?"

All this was uttered with extraordinary volubility. Madeline replied suitably, and her informant continued:—"Miss Gun. is awful sharp; she sometimes seems to know what you are thinking. Miss Jones is good natured enough, and she does all the speechifying; but Miss Belinda Jones is just such another as Miss Gun. The Frenchwoman is cross sometimes, and so given to favourites; but she is so silly; law, you'll see her laugh and cry in the same hour. And how long have you come for? who is your pa' and ma'? and where did you come from?"

Madeline coloured; she resented this rough cross-questioning, yet did not feel equal to a quarrel; indeed, though high-spirited, she was pacific, and too innately noble to take offence easily. Nevertheless, she was determined to reveal as little as possible, and she knew as well as though a volume of warning had been vouchsafed to her, that she must not betray her antecedents in the correct precincts of an educational establishment.

"My father was Captain Digby; he is dead; I am in mourning for him. My mother I do not remember, but my grandmamma, Mrs. Redman, placed me here, and I suppose I shall stay as long as she likes."

"Law! you are an orphan, then," cried Miss Summers, by no means sympathetically: "and where do you come from?"

"I can scarcely say," returned Madeline, prudently. "While papa lived we travelled about; he was very delicate."

"Well, where did you come from last?"

"From London," said Madeline shortly.

"Oh, from your grandma's, I suppose?" said the inquisitor.

To this Madeline made no reply.

"My pa," resumed Miss Summers, "is very rich. His place of business is in the City—Cheapside—perhaps you know it. It's a corner house, and, though small, he does the largest business in umbrellas, travelling bags, and ties, and all that sort of thing in the City. Why, I've seen 'Buy your umbrellas at Summers' written on the dead walls all round Stoke Newington. We have a large house there, quite as large as this, only rather differently furnished (in a contemptuous tone). Ma's drawing-room is blue satin and gold, and the dining-room—oh, the dining-room is splendid; real Turkey carpet, and bronzes, and pictures, Dutch pictures, old masters, you know; and we keep three servants, a cook, housemaid, and parlourmaid, and ma' says we must have a boy—a page, you know. My eldest sister is married to such a nice man, and quite rich—Henry Brown, of the firm of Smith, Payne, and Brown; they are in the straw-bonnet line in St. Paul's Churchyard."

And Miss Summers ran on, Madeline ceasing to listen, and looking round with the sense of pleasure she always derived from whatever of grace, beauty, or order, met her eye.

Springfield House had been the residence of some City magnate, and the grounds were extensive and tastefully laid out. Behind the house stretched a lawn of considerable size, exquisitely green, and shaded by forest trees of large growth—the remains, probably of some old chase or park—and one or two fine oaks and elms studded its expanse. The back of the house was partially covered with woodbine and clematis—the girls in their bright summer muslin dresses, grouped about in light and shade, produced a pretty effect—the order and regularity, if a little oppressive, was also soothing.

Madeline's thoughts wandered fondly back to her father. Oh! to have had him there; to sit in the shade of those graceful trees, and rest his eyes on that cool green, and quench his thirst with some juicy fruits, instead of the terrible bottle which made him so ill! Madeline could never realize his being intoxicated, for to her he was always mild, tender, gentleman-like; and his intoxication, too, was of the silent, dull order—the result of weakness and the effort to drown thought. Her dear accomplished father! for whom she could do nothing more—nothing!

"And how many servants does your grandma' keep?" was the next question of Miss Summers which fell on her ear.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Madeline, carelessly speaking out the truth.

"Not know how many servants your own grandma' keeps!" said Miss Summers, in some surprise.

"Come, Miss Digby," said the under-governess, interrupting the examination very opportunely; "you may as well see your

room, and unpack your clothes ready for the morning, as you have nothing else to do."

And Madeline gladly followed her up several flights of stairs, and was ushered into a long, large bedroom, where seven little white beds were symmetrically arranged, with an equal allowance of painted deal chests of drawers. Here Madeline employed herself for the next hour, transferring the contents of her portmanteau to the drawers, with the assistance of her new friend, the under-governess.

"Who sleeps in this room besides myself?" she asked.

"I do, and Miss ——, and Miss ——," naming the five other young ladies.

"Then the girl who spoke to me in the garden just now is not one of them?"

"No!" said Miss Moorcroft.

"I am glad," returned Madeline.

Miss M. smiled. "Do not be too ready to speak of your likes and dislikes," she said. "It is very easy to make enemies at school."

"I shall remember," replied our heroine, and relapsed into silence.

In her own mind she was reflecting on the painfulness of dressing and undressing in company with five or six other young ladies; for wandering though her life had been, she had always had some tiny nook of a room all to herself—and that sanctity of her own chamber was inexpressibly dear. Now, indeed, she felt that there was not one spot on earth, or one heart, she could call her own. However, she spoke nothing of all this—poor child, she was too bitterly convinced of the fruitlessness of contending with the inevitable—so she swallowed down her tears, not daring to ask for sympathy, knowing that she had no business to disgrace her benefactors by the revelation of her mean sorrows; but for the time being, all her higher ambition of being educated as became a lady, and a Digby, vanished, and her poor desolate heart ached to be back with Kit and Mrs. Fitzwarrenne, in the litle back parlour at Thames End, shelling shrimps for Gwendoline and Anna Maria; listening to the scraps of stage-talk from the host and his occasional visitors—dreaming of herself electrifying Metropolitan Houses as "Pauline" or "Mrs. Haller," and assisting kindly, slatternly Mrs. Fitz. to put the children to bed. She forgot, in the tenderness of the moment, how often she used to shrink from the discomfort, disorder, and dirt of the Fitzwarrenne *ménage*. 'Tis true, her own experience of life with her father was homely enough, still he had the habits of a gentleman even in their dire poverty; and as his child, whom he so fondly loved, advanced towards womanhood, he strove hard to restrain

his craving for stimulants, and to elevate his own tone and position for her sake, but it was too late, so he did the best he could for her, by dying.

All these thoughts floated through Madeline's brain, as she folded and put away petticoats, stockings, etc., and yet she managed to speak rationally to Miss Moorcroft, who made some general inquiries as to what she had learned, etc.

"I am terribly ignorant for my age," she said, confiding readily in her new friend. "I know a little of music, but I have no idea of French, and I am so anxious to learn it."

So the time slipped by till the bell summoned them to prayers. This was a very solemn proceeding, and consisted of reading a long chapter, generally selected with a view to illustrate future punishment and suffering, generally followed by an exposition of some popular Evangelical divine, strongly condemnatory of pleasure in every form, concluding by a long argumentative prayer—a collection of which, in a thick, obstinate-looking book, was one of the sacred insignia of office, and was handled only by the eldest Miss Jones, a smooth-looking gentlewoman, with grey hair and a matronly cap.

Then the young ladies each curtsied to Miss Jones, and betook themselves to bed.

Madeline followed, performing her night toilette in the privacy of a nook between her bed-curtain and the wall, and offering up a curt but earnest prayer for God's guidance and protection.

She heard a good deal of vulgar gossip and rude jesting among her companions, but she disregarded it, and with marvellous fixity of purpose in so young a creature, sought to comprehend her own position, and what line she had best pursue. She felt that she was singularly friendless, and the wisdom and instinct of her heart told her she must make friends. Then she felt that her grandmother was anything but a real friend. And the future—how about that? She must depend on herself. She must learn, learn, learn diligently to fit herself either to teach or to act; and so merciful sleep stole over her, and this most eventful day ended.

CHAPTER III.

A WEEK had scarce elapsed before Madeline, with the quick adaptability of youth, felt as if she had for a lifetime been subjected to a school routine, and time slipped rapidly on; no sign was vouchsafed by her grandmother or uncle that they took further cognizance of her existence. From the hour Miss Foster

had bid her good-bye, she seemed cut off from all ties of any kind, and she often felt a sort of bitterness and shame that the post never brought her a letter, not even from her friends the Fitwarrennes, who had been on the point of leaving Thames End for some other town, where the truculent Kit was engaged to represent a large amount of villainy. She was then ignorant of their address, and they of hers.

Her first acquaintance, Miss Summers, once observed with refined irony: "What a lot of letters you do get to be sure!" and Miss Jones also said on one occasion: "Remember, Miss Digby, I expect all letters to be shown to me, except those bearing the signature of your venerable grandmother. But I trust the influence of Springfield House has been already strong enough to check any tendency to surreptitious correspondence."

"I have never received or written a letter since I entered your house," replied Madeline, with an air of truthfulness her instructress could not doubt; but thinking to herself, "If I did want to get a letter free from your inspection, I see no reason why I should not:" an extremely improper though not unnatural sentiment.

Madeline's quietness and readiness to oblige made her on the whole a favourite, though her rejection of Miss Summers' advances towards chumship made that young lady somewhat of an enemy. "Miss Digby is no great things, I can tell you," she frequently asserted; "she is ashamed to talk of her friends, though she says her father was a captain; she pretends she doesn't know how many servants her grandma' keeps. Such nonsense! I suppose she has only one, and does her washing at home!"

Of course these rumours quickly reached Madeline's ears—school-boys and school-girls have small delicacy; but our little heroine had, with much simplicity, a certain individuality, a sort of pride and self-reliance, which rendered her nearly invulnerable to the opinions of others, save those few she looked up to and loved; from them disapproval was agony. She had been brought up in the forcing bed of poverty, which hurries young plants too soon into mental maturity; and hers was a nature only too ready to accept such forcing. While almost a child, she felt herself the guardian of her father; both head and heart taxed to the utmost to tend and shield him, for he was little able to take care of himself; and then that terrible bottle which disagreed with him so sadly! How many wiles were exercised to win him from this! and what happy moments she had passed with that dear father, when he used to teach her writing or history, the latter by word of mouth—they could not afford books; or, sweeter than all—singing, with the aid of his violin. Poor

Madeline's education had been of a most desultory and intermittent order; and from old play-books and odd circulating library volumes, she had gathered the strangest jumble of ideas about the world and life, mixed with the results of her actual existence; she had a real thirst for knowledge, and an intelligence acute and eager for a thorough understanding of what she had learned.

This led to considerable disappointment at the commencement of her regular studies; the routine of a class, the parrot-like committing to memory, seemed to mock her with the dry bones—the mere outlines of subjects—while her intelligent questions were considered impertinent intrusions by the teachers, and audacious efforts to make herself out unusually clever by the young ladies.

She preferred the French lessons to any others, as, although far from a profound intelligence, Mademoiselle Delplanque taught well, according to the system under which she had gained her diploma. Moreover, Madeline became soon a chief favourite with the Frenchwoman, chiefly because there was something un-English and sympathetic about her; and she treated mademoiselle with a gentle and unvarying respect; never once smiling at her blunders, and altogether assuming a tone in their intercourse most flatteringly dissimilar from that of the other pupils.

But Madeline's affections flowed really but to one, and that the governess-pupil, Jessie Moorcroft; there was a sweet, bright womanliness about this girl that won Madeline's heart, and she was sufficiently intelligent to be a pleasant companion, for she was peculiarly formed to follow a lead. She was always willing to do as she was bid, and learn as she was taught, without the silent discussions with self, or the troublesome root and branch questions to which Madeline was addicted. Nevertheless, the under-governess was a great help and guide to the friendless Madeline, who impressed her new friend with unbounded admiration. At first she had been inclined to pity her, for the neglect which had left her so ignorant on many important topics; but soon she began to feel that whatever they studied together assumed a new charm from the sort of broad view Miss Digby took of the subject, and the original way in which she connected it with some other branch of study.

So the time passed away, not unhappily, though at times words, and more, small actions of Miss Jones and Miss Gunston reminded Madeline rather bitterly that she was a friendless dependent. Nevertheless, study, even in the meagre way it was placed before her, had a true charm for the orphan, and the order of the place delighted her innate love of method and of beauty, in which latter order is always a component part.

Shortly before the school broke up for the summer holidays,

Miss Foster paid Madeline a visit, to her great delight. That gentle example of single blessedness was truly flattered at the *empressement* evinced towards her by the desolate girl. Madeline had nothing to complain of, and sent a suitably grateful message to the all powerful grandmamma.

"Tell her," she concluded, "my dearest wish is as soon as possible to earn my own bread."

"Quite right, my dear," returned Miss Foster, who, before the Miss Joneses, had delivered a second-hand lecture, considerably softened, on the necessity of Miss Digby's giving the most anxious attention to her studies in order to fit herself for her future career, and free Mrs. Redman from the burden imposed upon her.

"I have heard no complaints against Miss Digby," said the dignified head of the establishment, and with this cold commendation the interview closed, and Miss Foster, for the few remaining moments of her visit, was left alone with Madeline. The latter was neither mortified nor disappointed at this "damning with faint praise." She knew how much she had acquired, and this was a solid fact, not to be affected by Miss Jones's opinion. Still she thought quietly, "Had it been Miss Summers' or Miss Harris's friends who were inquiring after their progress, what loud praise Miss Jones would have given!"

"Miss Foster," said Madeline, as the door closed on the schoolmistress, "if it is not too much trouble, will you write to me sometimes and allow me to write to you. It looks so forlorn, as if I was something bad, never to get a letter; and my grandmamma, though it may be too much trouble for *her* to write, would she never care to see a letter from me? Does she dislike me?"

"Oh! dear, no! how could she! Only she is a little peculiar, though a most excellent, upright woman, and never writes even to her own children. No. But I shall be most happy to write to you, only do not be surprised if it is some little time before I do write, for I am going with your dear grandmamma to Ramsgate for a few weeks, and I shall write when we come back. I'm so pleased to have such a good account to give her; and be sure you take great care of your clothes, for your grandmamma expects not to be obliged to get anything more for you until winter."

"I will take care," returned Madeline, with a sort of sad submission very touching; and so they parted.

It is a great trial to be left behind at school during the holidays. The sense that the rest are going off gloriously to loving, abundant, welcoming homes, where their coming is a jubilee, and that no one wants you, especially the schoolmistress with whom you remain, and on whom you are a terrible restraint.

Poor Madeline felt this keenly, and strove to reconcile Miss Jones to her presence by liberal offers of needle-work and mending, for the young poverty-taught girl was singularly expert in these womanly accomplishments.

Miss Jones was but little grateful, or mollified by this, for she little dreamed of the skill she almost rejected.

The evening before the breaking-up, that is two days before the dispersing of the pupils, was a warm July evening, and Madeline and Miss Moorcroft stole out for half an hour's talk after tea in the garden. "I shall miss you sadly," said Madeline.

"Well, dear, I have a little plan," said Miss Moorcroft. "I did not intend to say anything until I was sure of your grandmamma's leave, but I have asked Miss Jones to write to her to ask if you may come and stay a few days with my mother and me, during the holidays. We are very quiet, stay-at-home people, but it will be a little change for you."

"Oh! how good and kind of you," cried Madeline, her large eyes lighting up with joy, as much at the kindly thought of her friend as at the delightful prospect of change.

"I wonder if Mrs. Redman—if my grandmother—will let me? She can have no objection, only I sometimes fancy she would rather I did not enjoy myself, that poor people should always be in a state of punishment. There are persons of that kind, you know. I have read of them in books."

"I hope there are very few," returned her friend, smiling; "but we must hear by to-morrow if she will or not. It is now four days since Miss Jones wrote."

"Ah! She is at Ramsgate, then," cried Madeline, "and that is the reason of the delay. I probably think too unkindly of her."

This suggestion of a visit to Jessie Moorcroft was a charming solace to Madeline in her first loneliness. That, and the unrestricted use of a piano remote from Miss Jones's apartment, helped her to support the first terrible solitude of the house. All day, for the first week, the heads of the establishment were immersed in accounts; and at meals they scarce seemed conscious of poor Madeline's presence.

At last, nearly ten days after the breaking-up, she was summoned to their private sitting-room, and there informed that a letter had been received from Miss Foster, on the part of Mrs. Redman, in which permission was accorded to Madeline to accept the invitation of her friend.

"Tell Miss Digby, however," continued the epistle, "that her good grandmamma desires me to say, she fears her readiness to run after new friends and amusement indicates a disposition little suited to her future life; that, dependent as she is upon the

goodness of others, she should show a more fixed and steady purpose of amendment and application, such as will fit her for the task of earning her own bread."

"A very sensible letter," said Miss Belinda Jones with a solemn shake of the head, as she finished reading it aloud. "You would do well, my dear, to lay it to heart."

"I have done so," said Madeline, in a somewhat peculiar tone, and colouring; "and as I am in truth anxious to improve, will you be so kind as to point out in what particular you wish me to 'amend,' as of course my grandmother only knows of my conduct through Miss Foster's report?"

There was a remarkable quiet in Madeline's accents; and the elder Miss Jones, after a moment's effort to recall some delinquency, began in a plausible voice—

"You have really done very well on the whole. I have no doubt Mrs. Redman alludes to that innate wickedness—that original taint with which we are all afflicted, and which faith alone—"

"To say nothing of your carelessness about your music," put in Miss Belinda. "You have by no means advanced as you ought in that accomplishment."

"It is true," returned Madeline, with the most hearty concurrence in the sentence, yet the words were uttered in a tone of independent judgment, not with mere obsequious submission to the decision of a superior mind. "It has been always the greatest punishment to me to practice those terrible tuneless scales and exercises, but I see their necessity, and I shall be more diligent in future—I will indeed."

The earnestness of her voice suggested to the Misses Jones that she was a greater delinquent than they knew of; and besides, they were of the stamp to stretch the granted inch to an ell, and consequently opened a lecture "in duo," in which the future, sin, the world, the flesh, and the devil, were set forth in appalling colours, and Madeline after listening for some time in respectful silence, could scarce repress a smile. Hers was the very type of mind that has in all ages produced revolt, that is, reform—a pure, bright, yet subtle intelligence, a loving heart, a most dauntless spirit, ready by nature to question every assertion, not recklessly or irreverently, but by an irrepressible instinct bringing all things to the test of her judgment, and yet tenderly respecting persons, At present her native good taste and sense would not permit her to utter a syllable of dissent from the harangue to which she patiently listened. Moreover, she knew it would but turn her schoolmistress against her; and at its close, when turning to leave the room, she stopped herself, and in her soft sweet accents put one question—"Do you think it wrong in me to wish to spend some days with Miss Moorcroft?"

"No, no; certainly not," exclaimed Miss Jones hastily, as Madeline's absence would be most suitable to her own arrangements; "there can be no objection to it whatever; I will write and tell your grandmamma so myself."

What a joyful task it was to write her first letter! Madeline, I am afraid, was almost a glutton over it, and favoured her friend, after the first page of acceptance and thanks, with a short summary of Miss Jones's lecture, and a few grave but droll remarks thereon—in short, covered two sheets of best note. In reply she received a guarded letter, with polite messages for the Misses Jones, a warm welcome for herself, and ample directions how to proceed to Camden Town, in which unaristocratic, but healthy, locality, Jessie Moorcroft's mother resided.

CHAPTER IV.

THE morning of the Thursday after the receipt of Mrs. Redman's permission, was a close, grey day, and Madeline looked eagerly from her window by six o'clock to discern the face of the weather. She was to wear her best black dress and bonnet, partly because three months' wear and tear, even with the most careful treatment, is "hard-lines" for an every-day garment, and Madeline's had given way in many places, and been patched, and grown glazy and brown in others, for which there was no remedy, so it was unfit to make its appearance in holiday time; then she was only to take her bonnet box; indeed, Miss Jones had suggested a bundle, but from this Madeline shrunk—there was such painful untidiness in a bundle.

So Mary, the under-housemaid, volunteered to carry Miss Digby's box to the omnibus office, at the head of the common. Madeline always was a favourite with servants; here her respect for persons stood her in good stead; she could not wound a beggar, while the loftiest presence did not overpower her.

With strong but repressed excitement, which lit up her whole face with a beauty none would dream under ordinary circumstances it could express, she bid Miss Jones good-bye, and holding the remains of her fifteen shillings very tight in a tiny purse, netted for her by mademoiselle, took her place in the omnibus.

"Don't you go up to the top, Miss; you will have to get out at the Helephant and Castle before you are half way," advised the experienced Mary; "and gather up your frock well, or it'll be all trod upon."

"Thank you, Mary; thank you very much," said Madeline, radiant with gratitude, and ready to bestow any amount of silver and gold (had she possessed it) on her adviser.

"You are quite welcome, Miss," returned Mary. "Here, conductor," continued this thoughtful person, "put this young lady down at the Helephant and Castle, she wants a Hislington 'bus."

"All right," replied that potentate. "Proceed, Jim," to the coachman. "Time's up." They drove off.

The very journey was a fruitful source of delight to Madeline, albeit a crowded omnibus is not the most agreeable mode of transit. But then Madeline had seen so little of London. The enormous number of vehicles, even on the Clapham road, the variety of faces in the conveyance, the change, the crowd, after the seclusion and monotony of the last three months, all helped to enchant her.

A little before reaching Kennington Gate, they picked up an old gentleman, very infirm, and in terribly shabby clothes, with an old baggy umbrella, and a shocking bad hat; nevertheless, Madeline, who had a strange, strong instinct in such matters, felt he was a gentleman. He had keen, almost fierce eyes, and shaggy brows; but when he dropped his umbrella, and Madeline respectfully picked it up and restored it, he smiled, and she was surprised to feel how familiar—dimly, vaguely familiar—the expression seemed, He, too, looked very fixedly at her; and just before they reached the Elephant and Castle, he leaned forward, and said, in a hoarse, whistling voice, and with a sort of peremptory civility, "What's your name, young lady?"

Madeline, greatly surprised, even startled, replied at once, without a moment's pause.

"Digby!" repeated the stranger, gazing more piercingly even than before into her face; but before he could make any further inquiries, the omnibus stopped, and the conductor, looking in, said abruptly, "Now then, young lady for Islington; York and Albany 'bus just starting."

Madeline, therefore, hurried out, got her box, and in the fresh excitement of crossing Westminster Bridge, and wondering what that large building at the other side of it could be (even venturing to apply for information to a fat, asthmatic female, in a green bonnet and a red shawl), the strange, shabby old man was forgotten,

The fat female, proud of acting as cicerone, pointed out to Madeline, as they went along, the Treasury, the Horse Guards, the National Gallery, and then they passed on through the glories of Regent Street, which to Madeline seemed indeed a gorgeous array, and she wondered, if amid the diversions of this delicious holiday she would be permitted to walk down it, and look into the shop windows.

At last they reached the York and Albany, and there was

Jessie Moorcroft and a respectable-looking servant girl waiting on the pavement, evidently looking out for her. It was very delightful to feel the friendly pressure of her hand, to feel she was away from school and her enforced subordination to all the rest, free for awhile from the sense that, do what she would, her greatest success was to escape rebuke.

"We have a little way to walk, so I brought Sarah to carry your box. You can go on quickly, Sarah, and tell my mother we are coming."

Jessie led the way through divers streets of greengrocery and shellfish tendencies, sprinkled with small dingy drapery establishments, at the doors whereof were ranged piles of prints and rolls of longcloth ticketed at fabulously low prices. Passing through these they came to a neat little row of houses with tiny front gardens, tiny bow windows, and tiny verandahs, on the strength of which latter ornaments, we presume, they were called Ashley Villas. They had little gates, generally locked, as the habits of the Camden Town boys are even more predatory than those of the ordinary type. A desolate-looking field, full of half-dug foundations, heaps of clay, and piles of timber, promised a corresponding row of villas or a terrace, but at present it was anything but cheerful in its aspect. However, Ashley Villas were considered rather a first-rate situation, and furnished lodgings commanded good prices there.

At one of the nicest and the freshest of these little palaces Jessie stopped. The muslin curtains and blinds were snowy, so were the doorsteps. The grass in the little front plot and the couple of evergreens in the middle looked as though carefully watered and tended, and a kindly middle-aged face in a neat cap trimmed with grey and black glanced at them through the front window, and then the door was opened.

"This is my mother, Madeline," said Miss Moorcroft, with a happy smile.

It was hardly necessary to announce the relationship, as Mrs. Moorcroft was just the original of the daughter, a little less refined and intelligent, a trifle more of the middle-class housewife, but yet a fitting mother for a home-bird like Jessie.

"Well, and I am very glad to see you, my dear. We have all heard a good deal of you. I am sure it is very kind of your grandmamma to let you come to us, for we are very humble people."

"I think the goodness is all on your side," returned Madeline, gratefully, and taking the kindly hand in both hers. "Jessie must have told you I have no friends."

"Nonsense, my dear, there are lots of friends to be had if you choose to deserve them. Take Miss Digby to her room, Jes-

sie. Dinner is ready now, and can be served while you take off your bonnets."

So Jessie led her friend up-stairs to a pretty little room with white dimity hangings at the back of the house.

"This is your room," she said. "I sleep with my dear mother in the large front bed-room, and my brother Willie, who is in the railway, you know, has the little room over the hall. The two rooms on the first floor, the two best rooms, are let to a gentleman who is engaged in the City, a very good person, but so particular, so you see the house is well filled."

"Who sleeps here when I am away?"

"Oh, my brother; and my eldest brother, who is in a large drapery house on Ludgate Hill, sometimes comes from Saturday to Monday, and has the little front room. You see it is a great help to my mother having those apartments to let—she is quite rent free—for it was a great effort coming into this house and furnishing it after my poor father died." This was one of the points of sympathy between Madeline and her friend; both were fatherless, but there, fortunately for Jessie, the parallel ceased. "But come, as you are ready let us go down."

They accordingly descended past the best rooms to the basement, where they found a very pleasant parlour corresponding with the one above, bow window and all. True there was a cupboard at each side the fireplace, more convenient than ornamental, but then the top served for book-cases, and a small old upright piano was placed behind the door. There were some prints, too, and flowers on the mantel-shelf, and altogether the character of the apartment was not inelegant though very homely. The cloth was laid and the stout girl was carrying in the dishes.

"You must be hungry, my loves," said Mrs. Moorcroft, busily putting some finishing touches to the array,

There was some nice fried fish, a meat pudding, some stewed fruit, and a glass of ale for the widow.

Madeline thought it the most delightful repast, everything was so neat, so delicately clean, and the welcome so warm. Oh, she thought, if she had but a mother! The talk was very cheerful. Madeline confessed her ambition to walk down Regent Street, and Mrs. Moorcroft asked her if she was a good walker.

She said, "Oh, yes; she was very strong. She used to walk a good deal with her dear papa (she did not fear to mention the defunct delinquent in Ashley Villas), but at school they had very little walking."

"Too little, my dear," said Mrs. Moorcroft, disapprovingly. "There's a great deal too much study for health. To think of women learning Latin and things! I'm sure it will never make them better wives or mothers."

"That I'm sure it won't," said her daughter, laughing gaily. "But if you are to earn your bread by teaching you must meet the demands of the market, as Sam would say; and as great ladies like to get a little instruction for their small boys thrown in with the young ladies' education, why we must be prepared to supply it."

"And Latin is not so difficult after all," remarked Madeline, "at least as far as I have gone; but that is only a little way."

After dinner Jessie and her friend indulged in a long talk, while Mrs. Moorcroft disappeared somewhere on household matters. Then the girls rummaged all Jessie's drawers, her treasures of books and curiosities, the usual sort of rubbish young creatures delight to accumulate, and tried to manage a duet, which the short compass of the piano would scarce permit, and the hours glided quickly past till it was almost tea-time.

"Willie will soon be in now," said Jessie. "I am sure you will like him. He is so clever. He knows whole poetry books off by heart, but he is very shy, so you must talk to him."

Tea was spread when the expected Willie made his appearance.

He was a tall, fair young man, about two years older than Jessie, with a long neck and sloping shoulders. His hair was light, and the moustache he fondly cherished gave a faint sandy hue to his upper lip. He blushed vividly when introduced to Madeline, and said something rather incoherently about looking forward to the pleasure of her acquaintance, to which Madeline replied with a grave, "Thank you."

During tea, Willie asked her, suddenly and abruptly, if she was an admirer of Tennyson? Madeline confessed, with sad humility, that she had never heard of the person, or thing, to which he alluded; whereupon he gave her a glowing description of that poet's works and merits, to which she gave so earnest an attention that the young man was enchanted, believing the fascination lay in his manner rather than his subject. And then Mrs. Moorcroft suggested, that as Miss Digby seemed interested, Willie might read her some of his own verses, in Tennyson's style—only, upon the whole, rather superior to that poet. This request Madeline seconded with shy eagerness, and the youthful aspirant for fame consented, with an air of lofty indifference, while trembling with excitement, and thinking that at last he had met a kindred spirit.

He accordingly produced something like half-a-dozen copy-books, in which were carefully transcribed lines of the most unequal length, full of words of the greatest magnitude and oddest sound. Poor Madeline listened with the most sincere attention, striving to follow the meaning, and longing for a dic-

tionary. He certainly must be an uncommonly clever young man, for she could follow Shakespeare in "Romeo and Juliet," and "Macbeth," and the "Merchant of Venice;" and also sundry volumes of Scott, the "Duchess de la Vallière," and even "Richelieu," without any difficulty. But Willie Moorcroft was considerably above her comprehension. However, she wisely kept her stupidity to herself, and the lecture continued till Jessie exclaimed, good-humouredly, "I think we had better go out now—the evening is fine, and you know, Willie, dear, I am not poetical enough to appreciate those fine things." A look of the most profound contempt, and even dislike, swept across the young poet's countenance.

"Then I ought to apologise for boring the company," he said, bitterly.

"Oh, no! no!" cried Madeline, eagerly, feeling keenly for him, and thinking her friend absolutely rude.

"I believe," said Willie, with a short laugh, "that Miss Digby is nearly as foolish as myself about poetry;" and he proceeded to put away his manuscripts.

Then the three went out, and had a charming walk in Regent's Park, during which much literary conversation passed between Madeline and Willie, although they disagreed on almost all points, for Madeline's likings were for very old slow-coach writers, and though she had read so few, and seemed so humble in her estimate of herself she was strangely tenacious of her opinions on some points. Then he was astonished at the telling manner, the sort of passionate intensity, with which she would recite favourite passages; and Jessie exclaimed more than once, "Why, Madeline, you ought to be an actress."

"Perhaps I may be some day. It is the way I should like to earn my bread," returned Madeline, quietly.

"Oh, my dear! you could not think of such a thing," returned the respectably brought-up Jessie, to whom Madeline had never told her father's connection with the stage; "and your grandmother would never hear of it."

"If I am to support myself, it will be hard if I could not choose my own work."

"Don't be such a rebel, Madeline; very few of us can choose our work!"

When the friends retired that night, Jessie, of course, saw Madeline to her room, and remained for a little private discussion of the events of the day.

"Willie is quite taken with you," said Jessie, laughing. "I suppose he will be desperately in love by to-morrow evening, and sit up half the night burning a whole candle, and composing some tremendous verses. Then, if you do not respond properly,

he will be in despair, and then hate you ferociously for a week or two, that is the usual course."

Madeline blushed! What girl of fifteen can hear of a possible lover with indifference?

"Oh! Jessie," she returned with a sigh, "few would love me! I am a little plain thing. But some day, when I am older, I should like so much to be loved! The way Claude loved Pauline, and Romeo loved Juliet. But ah! that is not likely; at any rate, unless I change very much. Oh! I would give years of my life to be beautiful. But your brother is a mere boy."

"What a funny little thing you are! Why Willie is nearly four years older than you are! But you are not plain. You are very nice, and your friends will love you always. Why are you so grave and earnest about what all girls make a jest of?"

"I do not know. A lover—a real lover is something so solemn, so sacred. I have often thought of one, but I cannot fancy what I should like."

"Miss Jones would say you were a shocking girl to think of such things."

"Perhaps I am. But can it be wrong. You know that all the girls at Springfield House talk and think of nothing else half so much—only they are so foolish. Why, Mary Davis said she could be Signor Caldesi, the Italian master's slave for ever, and he hadn't clean hair, and is such a funny little man; besides, I have always read that the lover ought to be the slave—not the lady."

"Well, I do not know! But a lover must be very different from a brother, if he is. Wait till Sunday, then my brother Sam will come up to tea, and perhaps bring his friend, Tom Harris, with him, and see what you think of them."

"It is little matter," returned Madeline smiling, and half-ashamed of having spoken out her thoughts. "My business is to learn, and prepare for the stage—of life," she added after a short pause of playful malice, to startle her kindly, but somewhat matter-of-fact friend.

The intervening days passed delightfully, and Willie went through the stages prophesied by his sister, which was somewhat of a drawback to Madeline, who respected the feelings of others perhaps rather too much.

Mrs. Moorcroft took her and Jessie a long ramble through Oxford Street and Regent Street. They visited the Polytechnic, and other wildly exciting places, including the Zoological Gardens. But the crowning delight remained on Sunday, when Mr. Samuel Moorcroft, a steady-looking young man of about five and twenty, with a good address and fair education, arrived punctually to tea at six o'clock, accompanied by his friend, who

was a sort of second edition of himself, only less good-looking, more lively, and assuming more the air and manners of a gentleman. They announced that the latter had been promised two admissions to the Haymarket on the following Tuesday, and that it was their intention to escort and treat the young ladies. Jessie patted her brother on the back, and Madeline clapped her hands with delight.

"Ever been to a play, Miss Digby?" asked Mr. Harris.

"Oh yes; many times. What is the play to be?"

"Well, I'm not sure. Something good always at the Haymarket."

"And what do you think of our two beaux?" asked Jessie, when she and Madeline were alone.

"Oh! I like your brother, he seems so good, and he is so like you. And the other, Mr. Harris, is very good, too, Jessie dear." And Madeline kissed her friend, and would not say another word on the subject. In short she imagined she had discerned something of an attachment between them, and would not for worlds have desecrated so delicate and sacred a subject by a single remark.

Oh! exquisite tenderness! How like to the rosy solemn waking of a healthy infant, are the first dim shadowy movements of a true woman's heart, when the spirit of the Boy-God moves on the face of the waters, and before the light comes!

Jessie laughed heartily.

That enchanting visit to the theatre closed Madeline's holiday. It was very delightful. She wept at the trials of the heroine of the first piece, and laughed most joyously at the fun of the second. Nevertheless, though resisting the ungrateful thought—the companionship of Mr. Samuel Moorcroft, and Tom Harris, was certainly distasteful. Though her antecedents were humble enough, poor child, there was that in her blood, her nature, which shrank from men of low degree. On this occasion she preferred the cynical Willie. Still her enjoyment was great, her gratitude warm, and her grief sincere, when the next day, she was obliged to say good-bye, and return in time for tea at Springfield House.

CHAPTER V.

Six weeks after the close of the last chapter all things had returned to their usual routine at Miss Jones's educational establishment, and Madeline had once more the comfort of Miss Moorcroft's society. She sought diligently to remove the stigma of inattention on the score of musical exercises, and began to feel the benefit of her perseverance in spite of the short time

allowed her for practice; she even petitioned for and obtained permission to rise an hour earlier, and so gain undisputed possession of a piano remote from the Miss Jones's apartment; still she was not permitted to have singing lessons, for which she pined; nor music lessons, save from a governess who attended three mornings in the week, and whose instructions were included in the stated sum for board and education. Once, indeed, she was tempted to apply to her grandmother through Miss Foster. She had been sent into the study, as the smaller school-room was called, to leave some music, and finding it untenanted, sat down to play and sing (from ear and memory) one of the old melodies she had learned from her father. While so employed the singing master came in, and to her blushing apologies replied: "How is it that you don't take lessons? I'll speak to Miss Jones about it. You have a capital voice." On this she applied to Miss Foster, who confidentially informed her that such an appeal would do more harm than good; that her dear grandmamma was, Miss Foster said, not inclined to spend more money at present, and begged her to have patience until the winter, when she hoped Mrs. Redman would ask her to spend a day or two, and learn to know and love her.

So poor Madeline bided her time.

The routine of life was dull enough at Springfield House. It was conducted on the strictest Evangelical principles; missionary collections pressed hard on girlish pocket-money; and the dreariness of Sunday was more than any pen could describe. All natural tendencies were considered deadly sins, as though Satan had been the originator of our being, which led to a good deal of hypocrisy and dissimulation. The scarlet abominations of Rome, and her deep-laid schemes, were topics frequently enlarged upon to these young minds; while the glorious freedom of Protestantism was set forth—that admirable system which leaves you to find out the right road yourself, but damns you if you happen to hit on the wrong one. Madeline, from sheer weariness, was inclined to side with the much-abused Catholics, though by nature, and in rights of her dauntless broad common sense, the last subject for Rome. But the sense of fair play made her sick of hearing but one side only, still she said little; and on such topics she met with small sympathy from her ally Jessie, who did not care one straw about these abstract matters.

So time went on with the rapidity always lent by monotony. Autumn was deepening into winter, and the shortened mornings compelled Madeline to give up her extra hour of practice, when one afternoon she was summoned to a private interview by Miss Belinda Jones.

Madeline ran hastily over in her own mind the events of the

past ten days, in a vain effort to remember some delinquency which might have given rise to this unusual honour. She had long ceased to expect praise or encouragement; her rich grandmother evidently cared too little about her to warrant such extra trouble; but at any rate she escaped censure, for, indeed, the heads of the establishment were carelessly well-disposed towards her.

On this occasion, however, Miss Belinda looked gloomy; and directly they had crossed the threshold of the private sitting-room, Miss Belinda began: "Pray, Miss Digby, how much longer do you intend to wear that old dress? I am really ashamed that the masters and professors who attend the house, should see one of its inmates in such a guise." Madeline coloured and then turned pale (dress was a subject very near her heart, and this particular garment had been a mortification long and patiently borne), because of the greater mortification of asking Mrs. Redman for another; but to be thus spoken to for what was her misfortune, not her fault, brought the hot tears of suppressed indignation and wounded pride to her eyes; still she struggled for calmness, and her voice was only slightly unsteady as she replied—

"I know it is disgraceful, and if I may quote your opinion I will apply to my grandmother for another; but you are aware I have nothing, literally nothing, but what she chooses to give. I am reluctant to ask, when she might remember that I have not had a dress for six months."

"There spoke an unsanctified spirit, Madeline Digby," said Miss Belinda, turning up her eyes. "It is your duty to ask your grandmamma for all that is necessary for your respectable appearance while in this house; and it is a false, an unholy pride, which leads you to expect that an excellent and venerable lady like Mrs. Redman is to think and act for you on every occasion, without any suggestion on your part. It is very disheartening to find you have profited so little by the careful training we have bestowed upon you!"

Madeline flushed again, then paled and bit her lip. "Perhaps I do expect too much," she said at length, in a low voice. "I shall write as you direct, and you shall see the answer."

"Very well. I don't quite understand the tone in which you speak; but I hope you have the grace to see you are in the wrong. I have no more time to waste upon you at present, so go and write your letter."

Madeline bent her head in token of obedience, and departed.

Before commencing her letter, however, she thought profoundly for a few minutes. Instinctively she felt that Miss Foster was weak and cowardly; moreover, she was in constant

attendance upon Mrs. Redman, and Madeline's memory of that venerable lady, in their one interview, presented a somewhat terrific picture, so with the generosity of a noble nature she resolved to beard the lion herself, and write direct to her "dear grandmamma."

The epistle was a difficult composition; she shrunk from obsequiousness, and yet did not like to seem ungrateful; so, after many corrections, her note stood thus:—

"DEAR GRANDMOTHER,

"I am very sorry to be obliged to trouble you with a letter, especially as it is to request that you would make a further outlay on one who has already cost you so much. My common dress has become so shabby, that Miss Jones has just told me I must not appear in it any more; and my best dress, though better, will not last long when I wear it every day. Will you then be so very good as to send me some material, strong and thick, for winter use, or authorize Miss Jones to get it for me? If you will also ask her to give me time, I can make it myself, and save something in the cost.

"Believe me, I feel deeply the expense I must be to you, and I work hard, I assure you, to be able soon to do something for myself, and relieve you.

"Thanking you for all your benefits, I am gratefully and respectfully yours,

"MADELINE DIGBY."

She read this carefully over, and then submitted it to her friend Jessie Moorcroft's inspection; both young things considered it a masterpiece of composition; so it was folded up, directed, and posted, with the sort of bitter sense of degradation that Madeline never could quite master, when she thought of, or in any way came in contact with, her grandmother. "Why," she often thought, and even said to her confidante Jessie, to whom she revealed more and more, as time proved the faithfulness and prudence of that friend—"why can she not leaven her charity with a little personal kindness? It is true both my poor father and mother displeased her, but what have *I* done? I do not wonder at my mother flying from such a home, and with such a man! Ah! he was very unfortunate and unhappy—my dear father. There is some evil always weighing down our race; but yet I will not think so—God may dispose of all as He sees best—and I am certain He helps an honest worker."

A post or two after brought Madeline a note, directed in a spidery, shaky hand, like a small milliner's small account, made out by some aged relative.

"I was very much astonished to receive a letter from you," it began without any formal commencement; "you must know I did not want anything of the kind. As to your impudence, asking for another dress, almost before I have paid the heavy bills for your outfit, it's just like the people you come of. Pray, do you think I am made of money? or have no other claims upon me? Why do you not apply to some of your father's relations, who, I understand, were very fine and grand. I see the sort of pride that is in you by the ungrateful anxiety you show to be free of my benefits, and sting the hand that feeds you. As to Miss Jones, I don't believe she ever made a remark of the kind—she knows better,—and once for all, remember, I will never attend to any request of yours for finery; if you want absolute necessaries, tell Miss Jones to apply.

"BARBARA REDMAN."

The blood surged up in one strong wave from Madeline's heart to her brow and eyes, which shot forth a glance of dark fire, while the usually calm brow and soft mouth contracted to a look so stern, that Jessie Moorcroft, who happened to be present, was quite startled at the sort of unexpected revelation in her friend's face. Madeline's sight then turned inwards, and as she thought her brow calmed and her mouth relaxed—"If in her power, what revenge would she or could she take on this poor, mean, covetous old woman. What?—and her inmost heart answered nothing!" A contemptuous word or two perhaps; but even this would be unworthy herself. No more could a civilized man revenge himself after the same manner on the savages who had tortured him. No. Mrs. Redman must act after her kind, and Madeline composed herself again after this glance at the deep gulf between her and her poor old grandmother,—rose up and went to Miss Jones.

"I have received a reply to my letter from Mrs. Redman," she said, "and I have brought it to you. You will probably act in the affair yourself now."

Miss Jones perused it with a knitted brow.

"Hum," she said, at the end, "you must have written a very improper letter, and misquoted my remarks in a most mischievous manner. I really begin to fear you are a dangerous girl, Madeline Digby. All this is very unpleasant. I have not been used to it."

"I wish I had a copy of my letter," said Madeline, feeling her self-control giving way; "but I can nearly repeat it. I should like to prove how unjust Mrs. Redman's remarks are."

"Don't let me hear you revile your benefactress," cried Miss Jones.

"I am not reviling her," interrupted Madeline, with a steady determination, eager, poor child, with all her precocious wisdom, to prove herself right to one resolved not to think so. "I said," and she repeated the substance of her famous epistle.

"That sounds all very well," returned the judge, "but how am I to know that was what you really wrote?"

"I assert it is," said Madeline, with a sort of quiet sternness that only irritated her schoolmistress.

"Don't answer me," was the retort, "I shall not permit this impertinence. Leave the room."

Madeline paused for a moment.

"Will you be so good as to give me the letter?"

"Certainly not. I must write to your grandmamma, and clear myself from whatever imputations you have made against me."

Madeline turned and left the room. She went straight to the dormitory, deserted during the day, and, in spite of reason and courage, and all her other qualities, had a fit of intense agonized crying, choking with sobs, suffocated with the helpless sense of wrong. Oh, for some friend to stand by her, not to indulge her, but to be just!

What was this life that stretched before her! One succession of insults, and oppression, and wrong! No! She would not submit. She would bide her time, and then try her fortune on the stage, or in any vagabond way that would lead far from the harsh, monotonous respectability of Mrs. Redman, the Misses Jones, and all the rest! And there she saw visions of success, and applause, and bouquets, and triumph of triumphs, a cheque for a hundred pounds to Mrs. Redman, in payment of her "outlay." Madeline thought a hundred would surely do it! Then she said a short but hearty prayer for help, guidance and protection, and rose up somewhat calmed. She once more addressed herself to the task of composition, and wrote as follows:—

"My dear Miss Foster,

"Mrs. Redman prefers I should not write directly to her. Will you then be so good as to say for me that I have received her letter, and given it to Miss Jones, who is going to write herself. Whatever they decide it will of course be my duty to submit to. I shall not repeat my thanks, lest Mrs. Redman should again misunderstand them.

"I am yours, very sincerely and much obliged,

"Madeline Digby."

This letter made the dear grandmamma very wroth. She knew that she had written to Madeline with furious haste, and that this unstudied production should have been submitted to

the lynx eyes of Miss Jones irritated the old lady beyond measure. Like many of her stamp, while despising the social position of a schoolmistress, she feared their capability to "pick holes" in all kinds of imperfect performances. Besides, she knew that, however deserving of contempt poverty and dependence might be, in all right thinking minds, the tone of her letter was, to say the least, scarcely ladylike.

"I knew that girl would be a thorn in my side, and a vexation. She is a proud, thankless creature!"

"I think, dear Mrs. Redman," replied Miss Foster, to whom this remark was addressed, "if you were to make your granddaughter's acquaintance you would see that she is certainly not ungrateful for the favours you have so generously bestowed. She is, perhaps, deficient in the art of letter writing—expresses herself badly."

"What nonsense you do talk, Miss Foster!" interrupted Mrs. Redman, in a vicious, querulous voice. "Make my granddaughter's acquaintance, indeed! I can't look on that Digby's child as my granddaughter. She *is* a worthless, ungrateful creature, and you just back her up in it! You are such a fool! and always ready to oppose me in everything! Now you will gain nothing by contradicting me, I can tell you. I am not going to be governed by a companion, or wheedled by my daughter. I wonder what you and Mrs. Comerford were talking so long about this morning there, at the front gate! And as to this—this girl, this pauper, I'll not give her another dress, and I will not let her inside my doors, so don't expect it."

"I'm sure I expect nothing," said poor Miss Foster.

"Well, go on with the paper then; finish that Willmington divorce case; though I am sure you do read so bad, I can scarce make it out."

However, in spite of Mrs. Redman's denunciation, Madeline's second holiday was spent under the grandmaternal roof. Moreover, she got the new dress, for Mrs. Redman was not proof against Miss Jones's application, which was largely seasoned with compliments.

The permission for introducing her into the temple of respectability was gained in this wise. Mr. John Redman, early in December, had condescended to enliven a tea-drinking at his mother's by his august presence. Mrs. Comerford and "papa" were there, and old Mr. and Mrs. Higgins, the retired broker from next door, and Miss Nettlethorp, and sundry other members of the distinguished society in Abingdon Villas. There had been lots of tea and plenty of good things, and several rubbers of whist, and a substantial "tray" with sandwiches, cold

tongue and fowl, and scolloped oysters, port and sherry, and hot brandy-and-water, and the general company had dispersed, leaving the members of the family to some private conversation.

"Fine seasonable weather," said Mr. Comerford, rubbing his hands. He was a satisfied soul, who never tyrannized over any one, or worried anything.

"Yes," replied his brother-in-law; "another week like this will put us well through the winter. Christmas is about a fortnight off, is it not?"

"Just sixteen days," said Mrs. Comerford. "I expect Susan Jane, and the boys home about the 20th. I daresay they have counted the days, poor things."

"By the way," and Mr. John turned to his mother as he spoke, "are you going to have that Digby girl here at Christmas?"

"No; why should I?"

"Well, I think it would be more decent. You needn't keep her more than two or three days, that is, if the schoolmistress gives her a good character. It would look well to bring her here for a day or two, and encourage her."

"I'm sure," cried Mrs. Redman, in a complaining, piteous voice (she never dared fly out against her successful son), "the grief and trouble that girl has been to me, no one knows, and no tongue can tell, to say nothing of all she has cost."

"Well, her coming here will not cost any more," retorted Mr. John, "and you'll save Miss What's-her-name's pay for so much."

"It is not to be expected that my mother is to be worried with a young person in her house at her age," put in Mrs. Comerford—"in the way all day long! now if there were other children——"

"Well, ask her to yours," said Mr. John, rising; "you have young 'uns enough."

"And I can tell you my age may be great, but I am not in my second childhood, yet, Mrs. C.," said her irascible mother.

"No, ma'am; by no means," said Mr. Comerford, attempting to be jocular and complimentary at the same time; "though you have cut your wisdom teeth, at any rate." Poor Mr. C. The last glass of brandy-and-water had warmed him out of his prudent taciturnity. Miss Foster shook her sausage-like curls at him from behind the shadow of dear grandmamma's cap, and the wife of his bosom kicked his most particular corn under the table.

"Well, I'll leave you to fight it out," said Mr. John, with the composure of a superior being looking down on the squabbles of

inferior creatures. "I have given my opinion, but you can do as you like." And after sundry good nights, he departed.

So, with much grumbling—*to* and *at* Miss Foster—Mrs. Redman yielded, and Madeline was invited to spend the Christmas week at Abingdon Villas.

This invitation was of course of the royal sort, all other engagements must give way to it; and Madeline very reluctantly wrote to express her obedience to the mandate, as she had hoped to spend Christmas Day and go to church with Mrs. Moorcroft and Jessie.

It was a bleak, black frost, and Madeline's hands and feet were nearly frozen by the time she reached her grandmother's mansion. Miss Foster met her at the door, and gave her a hasty, but hearty kiss; and then, after paying the cab, led her into the well-remembered dining-room, where she had been so contemptuously spurned. It looked even neater than ever, the glow of the fire reflected in the highly-polished sideboard, and the thick winter curtains partially hiding the dreary out-of-door aspect.

"Well, and how are you?" asked grandmamma, putting forth a small, stiff, unbending hand, and allowing Madeline to take it for an instant, without the slightest pretence of returning the grasp.

Madeline replied, and an awkward silence ensued, during which Mrs. Redman never even glanced at her, but occupied herself with her knitting.

"When did you leave Clapham?" asked Miss Foster, hardly daring to suggest any subject.

"About two o'clock."

"And it is now half-past three—no, twenty to four! What kept you so long on the road?" asked Mrs. Redman.

"We had to wait some time at the omnibus office, and came very slowly to Piccadilly."

"Hum!" said Mrs. Redman. "Hadn't she better go to your room and take her things off?" she resumed, after a few minutes' silence; "and do let us have tea at five, Miss Foster. I am wearying for a cup."

So Madeline was led away, with a strange sense of oppression weighing her down.

"I hope you have brought some needlework," said Miss Foster. "Mrs. Redman cannot bear to see any one sit with their hands before them, nor does she like to see much reading."

Never did the impression of that dreary afternoon leave Madeline's memory. How the three of them sat in the deepening twilight. Mrs. Redman at her knitting, Madeline with some crochet edging, and Miss Foster making a black silk apron, rarely speaking, and Miss Foster, when she did try to start a

subject, generally snapped up by her amiable mistress. Then Mrs. Redman dropped off in a fitful doze, only to rouse up and rebuke Miss Foster and Madeline querulously for daring to pursue some topic of conversation in an undertone, not to disturb their tyrant.

When five o'clock came, and it was proved that the unhappy Miss Foster had forgotten to order the tea half-an-hour earlier, with what an air of martyrdom Mrs. Redman affected to submit to the deprivation; and when it was brought, how she tormented the unlucky companion, by assuming that she felt too exhausted to touch anything, the inclination to eat had passed off, &c. And when she could no longer resist the cravings of appetite, how she grumbled over every mouthful of toast that she took. It was cold and sodden, and it was seldom *she* got a mouthful in comfort. After tea was a little better, for Mrs. Redman and Miss Foster had a game of cribbage.

As they sat down, Miss Foster observed, "If you would like a book, Madeline, you will find some in the breakfast-parlour. There are all Sir Walter Scott's novels."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Redman; "she should learn to amuse *herself*, and I don't wish her to read novels. I consider they were at the bottom of all her mother's misfortunes."

"Sir Walter Scott, you know, dear Mrs. Redman," said Miss Foster, "is always supposed to be most healthy in tone."

"There, you just talk as if he was a dose of physic. A novel's a novel; so mind what I say," to Madeline, whose name she seemed to have some objection to mention.

"Certainly," replied Madeline, with polite attention, and continued her crochet. Then a bright thought struck her. "May I finish your apron, Miss Foster?"

"Certainly, my dear; you will find everything necessary in my work-basket."

There was something like interest and progress in this occupation, and Madeline worked so diligently, that by the time the supper-tray made its appearance, the apron was completed.

The next day was Sunday, and Madeline accompanied Miss Foster to church.

Mrs. Redman stirred out very little in the winter; so, after the early dinner, there was a levy of Comerfords to pay their respects to her.

Madeline had a sort of dismal consolation in seeing they were scarcely better received than herself; though one boy, a solemn, studious prig, was decidedly a favourite. He was Mrs. Comerford's eldest, and considered a marvel of erudition, destined for the church, and looked upon as the future great man of the

family. There was the eldest daughter, too, an elegant young lady, quite as tall as Madeline, though a year younger. Susan Jane was at a first-rate establishment at St. John's Wood, much dearer, and consequently much more aristocratic, than Miss Jones's. They (the St. John's Wood young ladies) were high church in their views, embroidered altar-cloths and fald-stools, and worked ecclesiastical book-markers, and looked down on Clapham, as a low church, low-lived, dissenting sort of place, where small tradesmen's daughters and dependents (like Madeline) were educated.

To do Mrs. Comerford justice, she had said very little about Madeline's private history before her children, nevertheless they were perfectly aware, by a mysterious divination, that the girl grandmamma had with her was some sort of a poor relation, not altogether to be openly acknowledged, and they felt proportionately curious to see her.

Both the Miss and Master Comerfords were well and substantially arrayed; Miss C., indeed, almost gorgeously; she had a violet silk dress, and a black velvet mantle, a green velvet bonnet and a sable muff; she had rather light hair, but a bilious complexion, a little turned-up nose, a pouting mouth, and good teeth; she was remarkably well conducted, sat in an exact position, and made a slight curtsy when she left a room.

The dining-room looked quite crowded, and Madeline felt a little uncomfortable, for Master Comerford and Master Tom Comerford sat opposite to her, and never removed their eyes from her face. Miss Comerford never spoke, except to reply in subdued accents and monosyllables to questions addressed to her. Mrs. Comerford, however, made some advances to acquaintanceship with Madeline, inquired how old she was, and how she liked school, and if she was fond of practising. Madeline said she disliked it very much. "Dear me!" returned Mrs. Comerford, making a mental note of this bad indication; "Susan Jane quite dotes upon it; she is forever playing when she is at home."

"I like playing, just my own way, too," said Madeline.

Then Mrs. Comerford, who always entertained her mother, brother, and Miss Foster at dinner on Christmas Day, informed Madeline of that fact, and assured her she should come too, as if it was an uncommon piece of luck for her.

"I shall be very glad to see Mr. Redman again," said Madeline; "he was very kind to me."

"Dear me!" reflected Mrs. Comerford; "she will be wanting to get round *him*."

Madeline did not see her uncle till the following Wednesday, which was Christmas Day. The intervening time passed heavily enough. There was scarce an employment that found favour in

Mrs. Redman's eyes; though Madeline tried to please her, constantly endeavouring to check the strong aversion she felt springing up against her grandmother, by repeating to herself that although unkind in manner, Mrs. Redman had certainly bestowed many substantial benefits upon her. Her blood was much more inclined to boil up indignantly at the repeated and uncalled for insults to poor Miss Foster, than at slights to herself; but still she held on her way prudently and silently; she even darned several pairs of the old lady's stockings very exquisitely, and was permitted to read the newspaper to her; she was politely attentive to her wants and wishes; but through all there ran an inherent independence of nature, which the tyrannical old woman felt, and chafed against, though unable to define. Madeline snatched some happy moments too; wrapped in a thick shawl alone in Miss Foster's room, where no fire was allowed, perusing that most fascinating book, to a young and high-toned imagination, "Zanoni." How she revelled in its rare descriptions and weird effect!

Christmas Day was not without its trials. Madeline could not but feel keenly the unfitness of her dress to appear in so smart a circle; it was heavy and by no means new; but there was no help for it. Miss Foster kindly furnished her with a little white crape frill to put round the neck, so she brushed it well, and arranged her thick hair (which looked much brighter and more golden, since the regular hours and wholesome simple diet of school had strengthened her general health) in glossy plaits behind her small pink ears, and that was all she could do.

The dinner was at two o'clock to accommodate the younger olive-branches. Uncle John had already arrived, when Madeline followed Mrs. Redman and Miss Foster into the drawing-room, and was lording it upon the hearth-rug, having occasional wrestlings with Master Tom.

"Grandmamma" was received with great distinction, and even she unbent slightly; Miss Foster too received an unusual degree of notice; but Madeline felt herself an interloper, not that she was actively slighted, but thoroughly passed over; even uncle John from whom, somehow or other, she had expected better things, principally because he was a man, spoke a good deal to his mother and Miss Foster before he seemed to see her.

Then he said. "And how are you, young lady? The beef and pickles didn't disagree with you, eh! Why! I declare you have grown, or look older, or something;" and he shook hands good-naturedly enough with his niece. He had observed her, and with some surprise. He could not account for the strong difference between her, in her heavy unbecoming dress, and Mrs. Comerford's carefully trained and carefully attired daughter.

The wonderful air of distinction about her bearing and gestures, the undefinable grace in the outline of the head, the contrast between the dark earnest eyes and pale hair, the delicate face and refined mouth. No! Madeline was not pretty, not so pretty as Susan Jane when she had a colour; but then one was a *soubrette*, the other a young princess.

Uncle John was accustomed to see a good deal of high company at the opera and Ascot, and in Rotten Row, and was well up in the style of face and figure familiar to the frequenters of these places; and he recognised the same style, or rather the making of the same style, in the penniless orphan. Then what a slender, pink-nailed, tapering hand she placed in his large-knuckled grasp. She was a nice creature, unfortunately above her position; and not a sort of girl, either, that Tom, Dick, or Harry, rising travellers, or even juniors, would fancy—not enough flesh and blood about her for them. For uncle John was one of the large number of men who could see no possibly prosperous finale for a female except a respectable marriage.

The dinner was abundant and long, and on rejoining the ladies Mr. Redman found Madeline and Miss Comerford looking over a book of Swiss views in a friendly manner, the "dear grandmamma" was taking a nap, and Mrs. Comerford and Miss Foster absorbed in an undertone conversation on the sofa.

"Come, Susan Jane," said her mother, "you must play something, and let your uncle see how well you have been getting on the last half."

Susan Jane immediately complied, and played a long piece with no particular tune, but a great many flats and sharps in it, and runs and shakes wonderful to listen to. She did it all very correctly, and everyone was relieved when she stopped.

"Now," said Mr. John to Madeline, "let us hear what you can do."

"Oh, no! pray do not ask me!" she returned, naturally shrinking from the severe criticism she felt would be exercised upon her. "You know I can do nothing like that," and she looked at Susan Jane, who was complacently arranging some music.

"Come, we all know you have not been long at it, but do the best you can."

"Do what your uncle desires you, this moment!" called out grandmamma, waking up, in a sharp, authoritative voice. "Don't let me hear any nonsense!"

Madeline at once obeyed, and played from memory a simple introduction and arrangement of "Ye Banks and Braes," softly, and with taste; yet not nearly so well as she could do it when alone.

"That's very nice indeed," said Mr. John patronizingly. "Now give us a song." This suited Madeline much better, for singing came to her by nature; moreover, her poor father's instructions were excellent, so she unhesitatingly complied, and sang "The Minstrel Boy" with wonderful expression for so young a creature, with a fresh, sweet voice. The company were surprised, rather disagreeably, as though an unwarrantable liberty had been taken by Madeline in thus presuming to sing out boldly and freely in their august presence. No one applauded; even Mr. John, who of all present was most friendly to her, was silent. "Something too theatrical here," he thought; something that boded ill for that quiet, respectable success, beyond which no woman should aim.

A round game concluded the evening, and on their return, when Mr. John had left them, Mrs. Redman broke out upon the astonished Madeline. "She was an impudent, forward minx, who would never come to any good. What was she, to go intruding her squalling on the company! singing there, as if she was on the stage! but it was in her blood; and mark her (Mrs. Redman's) words, she would disgrace them all yet!"

"But," cried Madeline, irritated beyond self-control, and meeting the old lady's eyes fully with a dark fire in her own, that rather startled her amiable relative, "Mr. John Redman asked me to sing, and you had just openly rebuked me for hesitating to comply when he wished me to play. What was I to do? Do you know yourself what you wished me to do?"

At this awful climax of audacity, Mrs. Redman fell back in her easy chair, petrified. "Take her out of my sight, do, Miss Foster," she gasped at length, "or I shall have a fit; and get me a little hot brandy-and-water."

"If I have expressed myself unbecomingly," said Madeline, somewhat alarmed at the effect of her words, "I am very sorry, but I really did not deserve to be spoken to in such a manner."

"Take her away," groaned Mrs. Redman.

"Come with me—pray come," said Miss Foster, and Madeline was hurried to the room she shared with the companion. "What in the world possessed you to answer Mrs. Redman?" ejaculated that terrified individual. "What a day we shall have to-morrow! and for yourself—why she might take you from school and renounce you!"

"I'm sure I wish she would," cried Madeline, excited. "I would rather beg in the streets than have anything to do with her!"

"Oh, nonsense, my dear child; but I must go back to her, and say you are very sorry, and all that; you see she is not ac-

customed—that is, no one ever answers her;" and Miss Foster hurried away.

The next day was indeed a purgatorial period; however, by dint of much incoherent and ungrammatical apologizing and entreating, Miss Foster patched up a hollow truce between the belligerent parties, and the day after that Madeline, with a stronger feeling of pleasure than she ever thought she could regard it, returned to Springfield House, which, cold and desolate as it was, was at least an *open* desert.

CHAPTER VI.

More than a year had passed since the conclusion of the last chapter, with the extraordinary rapidity monotony lends Time's pinions. Madeline had again an opportunity of enjoying Mrs. Redman's Christmas hospitality. This time, however, she suffered less, and succeeded better, for she knew her ground; moreover, she had somewhat surmounted that bitter feeling of wrong with which she resented the injustice which rendered her best doings as worse than nothing, even demerits. She had cultivated indifference towards the opinions of her benefactress, comforting herself with a reliance on her own strong will, that when the time should come to work for herself, she would see and hear very little of her grandmother. At present that time was approaching. Madeline, it was tacitly allowed, had improved her year and a half at Springfield House to such advantage, that she was quite fit to take Miss Moorcroft's place when that young lady left, which it was understood she would, at the summer vacation. This, however, was a grief Madeline could hardly bring herself to face. She had spent several holidays, at intervals, with her friend, and learned to love not only her, but her excellent mother, dearly!

It was some weeks after the Christmas holidays. Mademoiselle Delplanque had paid an unusual winter visit to her adored Paris, and had returned. Madeline continued to cultivate the French governess, naturally taking to her language, till that worthy individual took a personal pride in the remarkable progress made by her favourite pupil. It was Saturday, and a half-holiday; Madeline was sitting with mademoiselle, in her room, assisting that lady to repair some of her clothes, and enjoying some talk about the world she longed so much to see.

"Yes, my child," said mademoiselle, "it is a hard place; but it has its pleasures, and this visit to Paris showed me some of them. I was invited to the marriage of a former pupil, and ah! mon Dieu! yes, with what tender respect! what regard! what

affection! You see, in France, they do not think they can pay for all things with money. There is a little something besides, that cannot be bargained for, nor repaid, save in kind. It was a distinguished wedding; two peers of France signed the contract; and my beautiful Julie, the darling child whose pure soul I had assisted to form, was all the most fastidious taste could desire; her toilette was ravishing, and the grace with which she knelt to receive the nuptial benediction, equally religious and touching; but I have had it often on my lips to mention that there was a lady there, an old lady, very *comme il faut*, much sought in society, who, I am quite sure, must be a relative of yours, dear child!"

"A relative of mine! Ah! that is not likely," said Madeline, with a sigh, "though I have heard my father say he had an aunt, I think, married in France. But what suggested such an idea to you?"

"There was something in her eyes and smile that seemed familiar to me, and I stood near as she signed the contract. Her name was Madeline de Fontarce, *née* Blake. You must know, I was aware she had been a British subject, and seeing the name of my favourite pupil, I saw why the respectable lady's eyes and smile were familiar to me; they resembled yours. Madame, the bride's mother, afterwards presented me to her, and whispered me to keep the old lady awhile in conversation. I therefore ventured to remark that we had a young lady in the distinguished establishment to which I had the honour of belonging, of whom she reminded me, and the old lady was interested. I mentioned the similarity of name, and Madame de Fontarce was still more penetrated. She then inquired your family name, and when I told it, adding that you bore an air of distinction and nobility, which pointed the resemblance between you still more strikingly, she smiled, and acknowledged the delicacy of my perception. Moreover, she said she had close relations with the house of Digby, and she added, 'tell your pupil, should destiny ever bring her to Paris, to come and see me; for though my brightest years have been spent in "la belle France," I should be glad to gaze on one of my own kindred once more;' and she gave me her address, somewhere in the Rue de—de—hold! I cannot remember; and it was stupid, no doubt, but I have lost the address! forgive me—I cannot find it."

"I am sorry for that," said Madeline, whose imagination had been roused and fascinated by this recital, "not that it can be of any real importance, as it is most improbable I shall ever visit Paris; and yet I have an ardent longing to see it—a sort of strange idea that it is, or will be, mixed up in my life and adventures."

"It is a charming and also a dangerous place," said the Frenchwoman, shutting her mouth firmly, and gazing through her half-closed eyes at Madeline, while she thought, "My faith! she is not thought handsome near these pink and white children, with their half-awake eyes; but my countrymen would be foolish over her spiritual expression, and delicate paleness!" She said nothing, however, of this, and the conversation turned, as it often did when they were alone, on the chances Madeline might have of finding an engagement to teach English in some foreign family; for the girl was ravenous to get away from grandmaternal rule, and seek her fortune.

From the idea of being cast on the world to fish for herself she did not shrink. No stranger could be colder, harsher, more sternly unsympathetic than her nearest ties. She had no tender home to unnerve her for the difficulties of life, and in that lottery she felt she had all to win, and nothing to lose. The idea of the stage was intensely attractive; but on this both her friend Jessie, and her ally, Mademoiselle Delplanque, threw bucketsful of cold water. It was not reputable. It would be a barrier to a respectable marriage. It was a desperate resource at the best. No! Let her stick to her profession, and endeavour to get a comfortable and remunerative engagement as resident governess.

Now Madeline felt a sort of repulsion to this she did not quite like to confess. Her mind, of a broad and inquiring cast, found perpetual thought of, and submission to, small proprieties very intolerable. To write, to read, to discuss freely, and question boldly, these were her delights, and a governess must perpetually renounce them. Nevertheless, she was by no means obstinate, and had no objection whatever to follow her friend's advice in the first instance.

The communication of Mademoiselle Delplanque respecting Madame de Fontarce *née* Blake, sank deeply into her mind. She would give much to trace out her relationship (if any) to this old lady. Her heart warmed at the idea of her father's kindred. They must be more kindly and sympathetic than the Redman faction. But what could she do! At last the original idea which had suggested itself to her mind took an active form. She would write to this old lady, merely a polite letter thanking her for her message. She consulted Mademoiselle Delplanque on the subject. Mademoiselle saw no objection, but did not think it of much importance. Madeline in some indefinable manner felt it was.

But then the address! Mademoiselle had unfortunately lost the address. Mademoiselle promised very readily to procure it from the friends at whose house she had met Madame de Fontarce. But then she hated writing letters, so several weeks

passed over before she fulfilled her promise; then several more elapsed before a reply came, but at last Madeline got it. In the meantime she had diligently composed an epistle, which she submitted to mademoiselle's inspection. The Frenchwoman's knowledge of English was very much slighter than she cared to show. She therefore glanced over it, and unhesitatingly pronounced it "*charmante.*"

The winter evenings were now stretching at the first chill approach of spring, and Madeline long remembered the hour of recreation which she stole after tea to make a final copy. It was in the French governess's little room. This small chamber looked out upon the pleasure grounds. The trees were still bare and gaunt-looking—the grass had not recovered its colour after the frost and damp of winter—and the evening light had that peculiar chill, and even sad aspect, which it often wears in early spring, when the lengthening days seem to have come before their time—a moaning breeze swept through the leafless branches, complaining piteously at every chink and cranny of the bitter battle between weak youth and stern age. In the intervals of her writing, Madeline looked through the window on the scene, and seemed to see her own story pictured. Oh! for a home! Oh! for a heart, however weak and burdensome, to be linked to, and of which she could be part. How chilly desolate was her lot. The very strength that upheld her showed her its loneliness, for she dared to see in its nakedness; yet with a dim appeal to the unknown future she wrote on, instinctively in an un-English, yet a natural style.

"DEAR MADAME,

"You were kind and condescending enough to send me a message by Mademoiselle Delplanque last January, in which you, without proof on my part, admit some relationship between us. I would fain confirm this, but I know not how, save by detailing my own slight knowledge of my father's story. He was Arthur Digby, of some place the name of which I cannot recall, except that it began with Bally; and he was also captain in the —th regiment of Hussars. His mother's name was, I know, Blake, and I was named after some relative of hers, of whom he had pleasant recollections. I feel an inward conviction it was yourself. He married my mother when she was very young. She was the daughter of a wealthy London merchant, who disapproved of the marriage; why, I know not. My mother died early. I scarce remember her. And my father was very unfortunate in many ways, though the best of parents. He died about two years ago, and now my mother's mother cares for me, and placed me here. Yet, dear madame, I am much alone, and would

treasure a word—a line—from one of my father's race. If the above facts accord with your family history, deign to say so; and though we may never meet, it will please me to think I am known to one relative on my dear father's side. From Mademoiselle Delplanque's description I would fondly hope I might trace a likeness between you and my dear, good father, and more, that were we to meet, I should find in you a sympathetic friend, of which, God knows, I stand in need.

"Believe me, dear madame, in any case, yours, faithfully and respectfully,

"MADELINE DIGBY."

Not so bad for seventeen; it was a strange mixture of impulse and calculation. That her heart really warmed to any one of her father's race was true enough, but that she vaguely hoped this old lady might be instrumental in assisting her to escape somewhat sooner the clutches of Mrs. Redman was true enough also, and considerably heightened the natural attraction exercised by this possible paternal relative.

Some more weeks passed, and no reply came. Madeline waited with suppressed anxiety, she scarce knew herself how much she had staked on this venture. The idea of remaining another year at Springfield House, and without Jessie Moorcroft, was terrible. She knew its trials, its monotony, perfectly; Paris she did not know, therefore she thought it must be better: though, to do her justice, she only hoped this possible grand aunt might help her to an engagement as an English governess in France; she never thought of living upon any one. She had but two objects—first, to escape her grandmother; secondly, to earn her livelihood as pleasantly, under her circumstances, as possible.

Madeline had a strong craving and capability for enjoyment, a life all work, all gloom, was something too dreadful to anticipate; and she struggled and longed after love and happiness, as a tree will strive, even through a stone wall (that intercepts it), for the light.

At last the postman brought a foreign letter for Miss Digby. Madeline thrilled all over as she saw it pass into the hands of Miss Jones, who, though she had grown more carelessly indulgent, within the last year, to Madeline, yet jealously reserved the right of examining letters.

"Hum! eh! This letter appears to be from a relative of yours in Paris, Miss Digby. Is it possible you have written to her without my knowledge?"

"No, madam, I offered my letter about three weeks ago to Miss Belinda, but she did not think it necessary to read it."

"Oh, very well, you can take this;" and Madeline eagerly read as follows:—

"MY DEAR KINSWOMAN,

"I was pleased to receive your little billet; from what you state I have no doubt your father was my late sister's son, and though I never saw him after early boyhood, I feel gratified to recognise you as a niece, especially as you bear my name. I have for many years adopted this beautiful and civilized country as my own, and shall never leave it; nevertheless, should the respectable lady, your maternal grandmamma, who has so kindly adopted you, ever visit this beautiful capital, I shall be charmed to make her and your acquaintance, and present you both to the small but distinguished circle it has been my good fortune to gather round me.

"Excuse the shortness of this writing, but it is an employment I seldom exercise.

"With the most profound regard and esteem,

"I am, dear niece,

"Yours faithfully,

"MADELINE COMTESSE DE FONTARCE,

"*née* BLAKE DE BALLYSHANAHAN."

There was very little promise in this epistle, yet it was a sort of gratification to Madeline to receive it. After mature thought, she decided to tell Miss Foster, in her next letter, of the correspondence, for she thought, "while my grandmother supports me, she has a right to have an outline of my proceedings." But Mrs. Redman took no notice of the communication, and matters went on for more than a month in the usual routine.

One fine April afternoon, the rank and file of the school were taking their accustomed walk round the common, Madeline and Jessie Moorcroft had managed to be coupled together, and as soon as they were fairly started, Jessie said, "Do you know, Madeline, I am so anxious to go to Paris—just for two or three months' finishing, you know; you see all the governesses who advertise now put in 'French acquired on the Continent or in Paris,' and I shall get but a poor salary if I cannot say as much, or something like it."

"Yes," ejaculated Madeline, with deep interest; "go on."

"Well, I have written to my mother, and shall apply through some of the governesses' institutions for an engagement in some school or family, where I can exchange English for French, and then I shall have hardly any expense, except travelling."

"Ah," said Madeline, with inexpressible sadness, "then you will leave me sooner alone. Oh! what would I not give to go

with you! Perhaps, perhaps, Mrs. Redman might let me go, too? I shall want the same preparation you do."

"Of course you will; wait till I get all the information, and then attack your grandmamma."

"And when did you write?"

"Oh, the day before yesterday; and this morning I spoke to Miss Jones. She was very good-natured about it, and said she would let me go a month sooner than was agreed, because (and I was very glad to hear her say so) Miss Digby is really much more competent than I had hoped to take your place."

"Did she say that?" asked Madeline, much gratified; "but perhaps she will not be so ready to let me go."

"That is true, we must try; she advised me strongly not to go into a Catholic family or establishment, I should be annoyed, and my principles shaken, and so I do not intend to go into one."

"Well, I should not care for that," said Madeline, "I should rather wish to see what their ways were like, and I dare say they are not half so bad as Miss Jones and her favourite ministers make out."

"At any rate I shall keep out of harm's way," replied Jessie, prudently. "My mother would break her heart if I were to change my religion."

"Oh! Jessie, I never dreamed of any danger of that kind; you could never believe the nonsense Roman Catholics do! It is against reason and common sense, though I believe they are very good people."

This sudden move of her friend's greatly unsettled Madeline, and she watched every step of the process with the deepest interest. An engagement of the kind sought by Jessie was not, however, to be found in a moment, and the period of breaking-up was close at hand, when Jessie came to our heroine in the evening hour of freedom, and told her with delight that at last she had had an offer to go into a strictly Protestant school at Versailles, but that she must start in a week, that the Misses Jones had consented, and next day she was to go to her mother's to make the necessary preparations. "But I shall get leave for you to spend a day or two with me before I start," she said, consolingly, "and now come and help me pack up, like a dear."

Madeline heartily assisted, though the tears would well over, and plash heavily on her hand, sometimes on the dress she was folding, or the music she was sorting. Now indeed she would be desolate, and even writing to Jessie would be a difficulty, when the postage was eightpence, and her pocket-money nil; yet with the truest unselfishness, she strove to hide her sorrow

from her friend. "Why should I damp her joy? As for myself, I must, I will get away from this place." Then the loneliness of vacation time came before her. How terrible it would be--always the same thing, no variety, no joyous sympathetic young spirit like her own to laugh with and build castles.

That night she literally watered her couch with her tears, and prayed most earnestly for faith, support and guidance; for weary as she was of the solemn school-room prayers, to which, indeed, she gave small attention, she had always an indescribable comfort in her own unstudied petitions, which broke away naturally from her heart, especially when uttered in the dark stillness of night, when she seemed to realize more completely the nearness of the Almighty.

CHAPTER VII.

JESSIE had gone, and the summer holidays had commenced. Madeline still resolved her scheme of winning Mrs. Redman's consent to her going to Paris, and had armed herself for this purpose with full information. She thought it would be well to open the subject by word of mouth.

"It must be harder to *say* No, than to write it;" so she put a postscript to one of her letters to Miss Foster to ask if there was any chance of her being invited this vacation to Abingdon Villas. The reply was an invitation for a week's visit. "This is the best answer to your question," wrote Miss Foster. "Mr. John was here last night, and as usual stood your friend, and it was agreed that you should come. I therefore lose no time in letting you know."

Abingdon Villas was a trifle less deplorable in summer than in winter. More light made a difference, and then Madeline and Miss Foster got out more. Susan Jane Comerford also proved somewhat companionable, and even condescended to play duetts with her.

As to Mrs. Redman, if she did not praise, she found less fault; though Madeline always felt as if in the presence of a living dislike, to whom her every tone and movement was an annoyance.

Some days of the visit elapsed before Madeline could screw her courage to the point of addressing her grandmother on any topic; but after reproaching herself severely for her cowardice, as she was dressing one morning, she determined not to permit another day to pass without attacking her difficulty. The weight and terror on her mind was terrible. She could eat no breakfast, but revolved in her thoughts in what manner she should begin; then she glanced at Mrs. Redman, and thought she had never

seen her look more forbidding. Miss Foster was bound on some errand after breakfast, and Madeline was to read the paper; so she toiled through that task conscientiously, and then when a lull ensued, began, awkwardly enough.

"I wanted to ask you—that is—I wished to speak to you about something I am very anxious——"

"Why, what can you be driving at?" said Mrs. Redman, eyeing her severely, with one eye looking through, and the other over her spectacles.

"You see, my friend Jessie Moorcroft, with whom you have sometimes let me spend a holiday, has gone to a school in Paris to perfect herself in French; and I should so much like to do the same."

"Well!" interrupted Mrs. Redman, a torrent of wrath in that monosyllable.

"Do pray hear me," urged Madeline, eagerly. "I wanted to go in the same way she has gone; and that is, to teach English in exchange for French, so that it costs her nothing but her travelling expenses, and you know you can command a much better salary as a governess if——"

"I know nothing about it," again interrupted Mrs. Redman. "I only know that of all the girls I ever met or heard of, you are the most impudent, and—and barefaced! Why, just as I begin to see a little relief before me, by your becoming a governess-pupil instead of a regular paying one, you dare to come to me with a new scheme of expense. Only your travelling expenses, indeed!—only this and only that! I'd like to know what sum your 'only' would come to in the year! *My* poor pocket could tell; and besides, the indelicacy of wanting to go off to a wicked, heathenish, indecent place like Paris! I wonder what keeps Miss Foster. She oughtn't to leave me so long alone in this way, to be agitated and upset. It's a perfect misfortune to be in the hands of knaves and fools as I am."

"I am very sorry I have vexed you," said Madeline, her heart beating fast. "I had no idea you would be angry. There surely can be nothing wrong in my wishing to improve, and fit myself for my future career. Do think of it—and—and if you would not mind—would you ask Mr. Redman's opinion?" This was the climax!

"What!—don't you think I am capable of making up my own mind—that I am in my dotage! I can tell you you are mistaken; and I never will consent to such nonsense as your going to Paris. I shall tell Mr. John of your impudence, and see what he will say to it. Ask his opinion, indeed!"

Here, fortunately for Madeline, Miss Foster entered, and a diversion in her favour caused by the report she had to render of

her morning's mission, during which Madeline stole away, and strove to compose herself and swallow her bitter disappointment. She thought the fact of the proposed change costing so little would have reconciled her grandmother to the project.

To her soon entered Miss Foster, with dismay on her countenance. "My dear, what have you been doing! Really, you never can let well alone. There, we were all going on quite peaceably; I really thought Mrs. Redman was getting quite fond of you, and you must go and bring down a thunderbolt upon us. Whatever induced you to think of going to Paris. Such a wild scheme."

"No, it is not," said Madeline, a little rudely, being much irritated; "it is rational enough. It is Mrs. Redman who is wild with unmerited dislike to me; and I will go to Paris yet, in spite of her. If she disapproves of Paris she might have told me her reasons—I should have listened with the utmost respect—instead of overwhelming me with vulgar abuse. Oh, you may look shocked, Miss Foster, but I would hate her bitterly if she were worth it."

Poor Miss Foster stopped her ears at these irreverent words. "Hush, hush, Madeline," she cried; "you quite frighten me. I did not think you were so wicked, or—or so imprudent. Now suppose I were to go and repeat what you say?"

"But I know well you will not," interrupted Madeline, embracing her; "you are too good and true, and like *me*—wicked as I am—far too good for that. Oh, Miss Foster, my heart aches for you as well as myself. Is mere life worth what it costs you? This everlasting fear and submission to an unjust. miserable old woman! Oh, wait and trust me. I have a design. I will run away, and go on the stage and make money, and you shall come and live with me as a chaperon. Ah, *I* will not tease you, nor trample upon you; you that spoke the only kind words I have ever heard in this hateful house."

And of course this heroic speech ended in an agony of tears. Madeline was not much of a crier, but when she did give way, her tears were a thunderstorm utterly exhausting to herself.

Poor Miss Foster, quite overcome, kept her company in a feeble way, and Mrs. Redman had rung for some arrowroot with port wine, and given her own directions for it, before the agitated companion ventured to show herself in the parlour.

It so happened that Mr. John looked in that evening to see his mother, who had by no means recovered her usual condition of angular ice, and terrible was the complaint laid before him.

"Well, I'm sure you come quite at the right time," began Mrs. Redman. "This young lady here does not think me ca-

pable of knowing my own mind, so she desires me to ask *your* advice."

"Eh?" said Mr. John, half turning, and throwing his arm over the back of his chair, his favourite and commanding attitude, "what's in the wind, now?"

Whereupon Mrs. Redman spoke, and that with an energy and volubility which astonished Madeline; she, however, listened in silence, and without an effort to interrupt.

After Mrs. Redman's eloquent exposition of Madeline's impious and audacious suggestion, there was an awful silence, and then Mr. John, from the height of his superiority, said, "Pooh! pooh! Quite a wild-goose chase to go off to Paris; better stick where you are; you know the people, and they you; but you might get into no end of mischief in a French school; and however clear the arrangement might seem, they'd screw money out of my mother, which I really do not think you wish to do, so be advised."

"Of course I shall," said Madeline, heartily. "I only offered the suggestion, for there is no doubt it is a great advantage to a governess to be able to say she has learned French in Paris."

"I daresay you can do the 'parley-vous' well enough," said Mr. John, "so never mind—and my mother will forget all about it."

Mrs. Redman neither assented nor dissented, but gave a sort of half audible grunt.

The next day, sooner by twenty-four hours than had been arranged, Madeline was despatched to her solitude at Springfield House. The Misses Jones were absent, not expecting the new under-governess (to which position Madeline had attained) for another day or two, so she was tolerably uncomfortable; this she regarded little. In the silence and solitude of the house she revolved a daring scheme, and arriving, after mature reflection, at the conclusion that it might do her good, and could do no harm, proceeded to put it into execution by expending part of Uncle John's last tip (he usually gave her five shillings) in the purchase of some foreign note-paper and envelopes;—the whole of the following morning she devoted to the composition of the following letter:—

"TO MADAME LA COMTESSE DE FONTARCE.

"DEAR AND RESPECTED AUNT,

"I have refrained from writing, since your most kind and welcome reply to mine of last February, fearing to give you needless trouble. I now do so, because I think you might possibly help me in a matter I have much at heart.

"I readily acknowledge that I have no claim upon you but if out of your kindness, you can and will help me, you will bestow a great benefit; if you cannot, I am no worse off than before. My grandmother, Mrs. Redman, has, as I mentioned, so far adopted me, that she has generously placed me in this establishment, at her own expense, to enable me to earn my own living as a governess, and now my greatest friend here has been sent by her own friends (people in poor circumstances) to Paris, in order that she may command a better position hereafter as an instructress here. I have petitioned Mrs. Redman to afford me the same advantage—she refuses, saying most truly, that I have already cost her so much, I must now remain here as an undergoverness, to lighten the expense to her. I cannot murmur, for I owe her everything money could pay for. But, madam, I cannot relinquish my desire to profit by the advantages of a residence in Paris, without an effort. I may be making a most unreasonable request, if so, refuse it, and forgive me—but if, without inconvenience to yourself, you can help me—ah, for the sake of our common blood, do not. I know little of life; I am penniless and nearly friendless, but madam, bind me to you by your present help, and you have found a daughter—a faithful follower; you may not want such a one, but at least a benefit conferred has its worth before the Great Judge, under whose eye we stand. I am capable of instructing in my own language, in exchange for what I receive, that may be a consideration.

"I am, perhaps, foolish, but my heart craves for something beyond this cold place, this death-in-life existence, and it turns to you, the only one linked with my dear father of whom I have ever known. You may have children, and numerous claims upon you. If so, reject me, I but try my chance, and I *know* if you can you will help me; if you cannot, still accept the hearty blessing of your stranger, yet attached niece,

"MADELINE DIGBY."

The reader must imagine the silent suspense in which Madeline passed the time intervening between the dispatch of this epistle and the reply.

The Misses Jones had returned, and were considerably and unpleasantly surprised to find Madeline at Springfield House before them; evidently the sub-governess was no favourite with her rich relations, or she would not be so readily sent back, like a bad shilling, on their hands. But Madeline was too absorbed to mind them; her fate, she felt, hung on the next day or two.

Although the time seemed long, yet the reply came quickly; it was curious in its wording, yet satisfied her to whom it was addressed.

"Madeline Digby," it began, "time has not yet so chilled my blood that I cannot feel for you; yet, understand me, I am a poor widow—poorer than you, than any one knows. If, therefore, you have hopes from the Redman grandmother, do not throw them away, you will get nothing in exchange. If, however, you *really* have but your own exertions to look to, I may be able to serve you for a year or two, but beyond that build no hopes. Gracious powers! your father ought not to have left you in such a position. How did it come about? Let me know how I shall proceed; let us not offend the Redman; give me the *carte du pays*, and remember the most powerful talisman in life is—*money*. I confide this letter to your honour—the honour of a Digby.

"Your friend,

"MADELINE DE FONTARCE,
"*née* BLAKE DE BALLYSHANAHAN."

Madeline's reply, by return of post:—

"MADAME,

"Accept my warmest gratitude. I am yours from this moment. Your letter, committed to memory, no longer exists. In a few days you will receive a formal application for assistance from me—written with Mrs. Redman's consent, to which you will make what reply you think fit. Ah! how different you are from her; yet I am not ungrateful, as I shall prove to you, if God gives me the opportunity; your friendly words give me life; yet I understand you—beyond a start I ask nothing.

"Yours gratefully, devotedly,
"MADELINE DIGBY."

She now felt that the plot thickened; but knowing how little chance a *viva voce* communication had of being attended to, she wrote to Mrs. Redman, applying for leave to ask Madame de Fontarce's assistance towards a year's residence in Paris. To this she received no reply for more than a week, and then a very short, sullen assent, dictated by "grandmamma," but written by Miss Foster. In short, Mrs. Redman delayed her reply until she had consulted Mr. John, who advised that she should not prevent Madeline from claiming assistance from her father's relatives.

"I daresay this old woman with a big name is a pauper, like the rest of them," he concluded; "but if she should be able and willing to give the girl a lift it will relieve you, and if not, why it will show her who she has to look to and obey." So Madeline, overjoyed to have Mrs. Redman's consent, for to do her justice she was reluctant to have any quarrel with her, lost no time in

availing herself of the permission. She wrote a proper and formal letter, of which she enclosed a copy to Mrs. Redman, and waited the reply with what patience she could command. The result was a summons to stay from Saturday to Monday at Abingdon Villas, which she tremblingly obeyed. "What was going to happen?" Almost directly she entered the august presence of grandmamma, she felt there was a subtle change, an increase of warmth in the moral atmosphere; the curl of the grandmaternal lips was a shade less sour; the tone of her voice expressed less fully—"I hate the sight of you!" and the five digits extended to meet her grasp a trifle less rigid. "Go, take off your bonnet," said Mrs. Redman; "your uncle John is coming to tea, and we will talk the matter over."

"Her uncle John!" Never before had Mrs. Redman alluded to this relationship in any way. Was "Madame de Fontarce, *née* Blake de Ballyshanahan" going to prove a fairy godmother, and charm away the cloud of indifference and dislike which always appeared to hang over her in Abingdon Villas.

This cheering idea was confirmed by Miss Foster stealing up and giving her a little warm, congratulatory kiss. "Such a nice letter from your aunt, my dear; quite a woman of rank and fashion, evidently; but you must make haste and come down; you are later than we expected."

Madeline explained that some duties connected with the reassembling of the school and her new position, had detained her. "And, oh! it is dreary without Jessie Moorcroft," she concluded.

This perceptible, though unaccountable change made her heart beat, and called a soft colour to her cheek, the effect of which was to startle uncle John, who had arrived during her absence. This plain girl could look absolutely charming—not beautiful, she had not feature enough for that. But a dim fear that she might prove only too attractive made him involuntarily shake his head; however, he said nothing, and shook hands with his usual air of patronage.

"Let us have our tea first," said Mrs. Redman, whose taste for that beverage was nearly insatiable; "we can read the letter afterwards."

The evening meal appeared interminably prolonged to Madeline; but at last the smart housemaid cleared away the last relics, and the door was shut.

"Now, Miss Foster, you had better read that letter aloud, and then we can all judge."

So Miss Foster went and got out a large desk, and from it took a large envelope of thin paper, sealed with a monstrous seal, bearing the impress of a deeply-cut coat-of-arms, surmounted by

a coronet; the paper had been carefully cut from round this dignified appendage, in order to leave it unbroken; then Miss Foster drew forth a sheet of thin pale grey paper, perfumed, written over with violet ink, and having a coronet in violet at the top of the first page. Then Miss Foster cleared her throat; Mrs. Redman interlaced her fingers, and rested her hands on her abdominal region; uncle John turned to face Miss Foster, threw his arm over the back of his chair, prepared to pass judgment, however intricate the case; and Madeline clasped her hands and tried to sit still.

"Ahem!" said Miss Foster.

"TO THE HONOURABLE MRS. REDMAN.

"MADAM,

"Confiding in the courtesy which always distinguishes persons of a generous nature, I address myself to you on a subject of interest to us both—I mean our young relative, Madeline Digby, who informs me of your benevolence in clothing, maintaining, and educating her.

"She also informs me that she is desirous of perfecting herself in the language of this country by a residence in Paris, and requests my assistance towards this end, acknowledging, however, that you have the first right to control her movements. I beg to submit to your approval what I propose to do.

"I am willing to maintain and educate Madeline Digby for the next two years, if you, madam, will of your bounty supply a small annual sum, say twenty-five pounds, towards her necessary apparel, and provide her travelling expenses to Paris, and from Paris to London should you desire to see her.

"After this period, should she prove a girl of graceful manners and creditable deportment, I am further willing to introduce her to my society, and endeavour to find a fitting *parti* for her, difficult as it is to obtain one for a girl without fortune.

"Should she not be of a calibre calculated to succeed, I shall no doubt be enabled to place her in some family of distinction, where she can respectably earn her own bread—you, respected madam, in either case assisting in the matter of outfit. I append this slight stipulation knowing the noble pride of an Englishwoman who would not devolve all the natural responsibilities on another. Ultimately it must depend on the conduct of the young stranger herself how I may dispose of the few worldly goods which must remain when I quit this scene of trial. No doubt mine is but a paltry portion compared to the colossal fortunes to which you merchant princes of England are accustomed. Nevertheless, my late husband, Monsieur le Comte de Fontarce, has left his widow better off

than the generality of soldiers' widows—even those of the soldiers of his great general and friend."

"That was the Emperor Napoleon," ejaculated Mrs. Redman, in a tone of some awe.

"Therefore," continued Miss Foster reading, "whenever you decide upon sending the young lady to me, give me a week's notice, and I shall be ready to receive her.

"Accept, madam, the assurance of my most profound esteem,

"MADELINE DE FONTARCE,
"*née* BLAKE DE BALLYSHANAHAN."

"Rue de ——, Numero 27."

"That's the letter of a real lady," said Mrs. Redman, "and (to Madeline) I must say you are in great luck. You see, if you only behave well, she'll leave you everything, and though she makes little of it, she is evidently well off. Indeed, if she wasn't, how could she provide for you, for *I* know that's no trifle."

"Well, that *is* a proof," said Mr. John, who had been inspecting the letter, "but it's very seldom the widow of a Frenchman has much to leave. However, there is no reason why Madeline shouldn't try her chance, and for my part, I am willing to continue my twenty pounds a-year for a couple more. I suppose, ma'am (to Mrs. Redman), you'll give the extra five pounds. Only I must say, considering we have done the needful unassisted for two years, the old countess makes a tolerable bargain. I'll go halves in travelling expenses. I suppose a fi'-pun' note will do it all."

"Yes," said Mrs. Redman, coming in like the treble in a duet, addressing Madeline, "and you ought to be thankful that such friends have been raised up for you, and never forget that I first took you out of the mire, and only for me you would never have heard of the countess or anything else, so don't be ungrateful."

"And I'm sure," put in poor Miss Foster, "it is quite like a novel."

"I trust I shall never prove ungrateful," cried Madeline, with glowing cheeks and glistening eyes. "Perhaps I may yet obtain a good salary in some distinguished family, and be able to repay some part of all the money I have cost you."

"You are both talking nonsense," said Mrs. Redman.

At length it was decided that Mrs. Redman should reply to Madame de Fontarce, leaving Madeline to pen her own gratitude and acceptance. Warning must also be given to the Misses Jones, and some arrangement made by which the legal term of

three months might be curtailed. But on the whole this last visit of Madeline to Abingdon Villas was a success.

The Comerfords looked upon her as emerging from the depths of obscurity to which they seemed at first to have consigned her, and even Susan Jane found a great many more topics in common with the *protégée* of a countess, albeit a French one, than with the governess-pupil of Miss Jones's establishment for young ladies, at Clapham.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was all settled at last, however; some other governess-pupil was found to fill Madeline's place; and a couple of months after the receipt of Madame de Fontarce's letter, she started one fine September morning for the French capital—the goal of her hopes. Mrs. Redman had declined to make any such stipulations as were suggested by Miss Jones respecting religious doctrines to be imparted to her grand-daughter. "Madame de Fontarce is going to spend her money," she replied, "and it is no business of mine to interfere with her plans. I suppose you have made a good Protestant of Miss Digby, and she is old enough now to take care of herself."

Madeline had, to her great joy, received permission to spend the two days immediately preceding her departure with the kind motherly Mrs. Moorcroft, who undertook to see her safely away. Mrs. Redman, though assenting ungraciously, was glad to have the trouble off her hands, and moreover saved the additional cab fare for Miss Foster, whom decency would have compelled her to send to the station with Madeline. Mr. John did not of course bend his majestic mind to details, but he shook hands good-naturedly with Madeline when he saw her the evening before her departure at his mother's, and on this occasion extended his usual "tip" to a sovereign. Mrs. Redman also went the length of bestowing on the departing waif ten shillings, beyond the stipulated "fi'-pun'" note for travelling expenses.

Mrs. Moorcroft's eldest son showed Madeline much kind and useful attention, got part of her money changed into francs and Napoleons, and arranged to see her off at London Bridge Station. Madeline's luggage was small, as Madame de Fontarce had requested Mrs. Redman not to provide any outfit, preferring to clothe her niece after her own fashion.

It was a bright, clear morning, with just the crispness of coming frosts to exhilarate the spirits, when Madeline took her place in a second-class carriage. She had a respectable Englishman and his wife, and a *commis-voyageur* for fellow travellers; two more companions—a French *bonne* returning to her native town,

and a nondescript gentleman, with lots of plaids and umbrellas, and a red face—joined them at Redhill, but the journey to Folkestone was performed rather silently.

Madeline's sense of loneliness was lost in the delicious feeling of freedom created by the new and shifting scenes, the rapidity of motion, the sort of unreasoning, yet strong conviction that she was hastening to something more congenial than she had encountered since her poor father's death; at all events, the "world was all before her," and little to regret behind. To her brave, strong spirit the mere idea of starting to seek her fortune was delicious; surely in that wide future she would find some one to love and understand her, and for the loneliness, the bleakness, she had no fear! Madeline had a strong—a dangerous love of freedom for a woman! Her baggage being registered through to Paris, she passed the ordeal of landing at Boulogne with some nervousness, but small difficulty. How wonderfully strange everything seemed. The custom-house officers strapped up in their loose overcoats, the matelottes with their long earrings and peculiar caps, like the chorus at an opera, their wooden shoes, shrill voices, and eager gestures; the difference of habit, temperament, and character stamped on every person and thing that met her eye, compared with that she had left scarce two hours ago. It was all new indeed, yet it did not produce the terrible effect on Madeline it does on so many young girls—no; her heart sprung up with a sort of pleasure in every indication that she had left London, her grandmother, Abingdon Villas and its oppressing respectability far behind, a delight in the kind of picturesque irregularity which characterised everything.

She had but a hurried glimpse of Boulogne, as (her passport exhibited) she hastened with the French *bonne*—whose fancy she had taken, partly by her attempts to speak French, and still more by her genuine admiration of all she saw on French ground—to secure places in the railway omnibus. Madeline gladly availed herself of this woman's companionship, and they got seats side by side in the train.

The journey to Paris was performed without any circumstance worthy of note. Madeline thought she had never seen a country so desolate as that between Boulogne and the capital, or tasted a morsel so delicious as the slice of ham, which, with a *petit pain* and cup of coffee, her companion persuaded her to take at Amiens.

It was a long journey, however, and Madeline felt rather depressed with fatigue and exhausted by extinct excitement before she reached the northern terminus.

Madame de Fontarce had promised that she would have some

one to meet Madeline at the station, and the question how she should recognise that some one occupied our heroine's thoughts a good deal as night closed in. However, no one was allowed to approach the passengers from without until the baggage was examined. This was soon accomplished in Madeline's case, and then, with the other passengers, she defiled through a narrow gate, following the porter who carried her portmanteau. Close by this portal stood a stout, solid, respectable-looking female, in one of the usual close-tied and dainty caps which *bonnes* delight in, and a black cloth mantle, for the night was chilly. She wore long, gold earrings, and had small, black, flashing, restless eyes, and a brown complexion. She had a jovial, kindly, though somewhat bold expression, and altogether was a favourable specimen of the class to which she seemed to belong.

"*Tenez, mademoiselle,*" she exclaimed, laying a hand on Madeline's arm. "Your name, if you please?"

"Madeline Digby."

"Ah! yes; I knew it," in a triumphant tone. "I am here to meet you on the part of Madame la Comtesse; where is your baggage? I will conduct you at once to her apartment."

Madeline indicated the portmanteau, and immediately the envoy of "Madame la Comtesse" drew her hand through her arm with a familiarity in no way disrespectful, and spoke a few rapid words to the porter; with equal rapidity she secured a *fiacre*, and ordered Madeline to give the porter a *pour boire*.

"Do it for me," replied the young stranger, handing her purse to her temporary protectress; whereupon a few sous changed hands, and they proceeded, through some rather dark streets at first, but afterwards through almost fairy-like scenes along the boulevards, where the shops were not yet closed, and the footways and cafés were still crowded.

Madeline gazed from the carriage window, half-charmed, half-bewildered; her exclamations of delight gratifying her escort, who was further pleased to find her observations were understood, and replied to intelligently, if not fluently.

"Mademoiselle could speak well, but astonishingly well! Madame la Comtesse would be charmed! Madame la Comtesse was expecting mademoiselle with the tenderest emotion, and would be *chez elle* to meet her." This last announcement was given in a tone commensurate with the enormous sacrifice implied. "Madame had given up the latter portion of a *conversazione* at Madame la Générale de Chateau-Foulard in order to receive mademoiselle," &c., &c.; the good Bordelaise (as she informed Madeline she was, and Madame de Fontarce's femme-de-chambre) chattered on.

At last, having left the lights and fairyland for some time,

they stopped at a dark gateway, and the femme-de-chambre descended with startling rapidity; then a short, sharp conflict with the driver ensued, which called forth from some hidden retreat a little man with a grey cap, and a shiny pair of trowsers—shiny from much service, strapped tightly round his small waist with a leathern belt, and having a half-military appearance; he threw in a few abstract observations, but the Bordelaise routed the driver, and then addressing the small man as Monsieur le Concierge, requested his assistance to carry in the portmanteau of mademoiselle, which he accordingly did, though not very readily, or efficiently, Madeline thought,

The whole scene was indelibly stamped upon her mind, as she followed her guide into the archway; beyond was a wide space, filled with a vague, soft darkness; to the left, a high, narrow door showed a small chamber, apparently in the thickness of the wall, where a tall female in a white cap was bending over some needle work, and a boy in a blouse was tying up a parcel, all displayed by the light of a moderator lamp, as well as a sword and musket suspended over the mantel-shelf, and an old-fashioned clock surmounting a cabinet; to the right a small archway, lighted by a dim gaslight, showed a flight of narrow stairs, leading away up into darkness, between two walls.

Up these stairs, with some muttered expressions of dissatisfaction, Monsieur le Concierge assisted, or hindered, Madeline's conductress to carry the portmanteau, while she, half amused, half shuddering, followed. The stairs were steep and long, with a rope attached to one side, to aid the ascent; at the top the femme-de-chambre stopped, and opened the door with a pass key; the portmanteau once across the threshold, Monsieur le Concierge descended rapidly, and Madeline followed her guide into a sort of vestibule, profoundly dark, across which they groped their way. The femme-de-chambre tapped at a door opposite that by which they entered.

"*Mais entrez, entrez toujours,*" said a soft-toned, slightly tremulous voice, and the door was opened. Madeline paused half a second, and then passed in. The room was of moderate size but low, with a dark, polished floor, studded here and there with little islands of carpet. The walls were white, with prettily designed groups of flowers, the curtains of some rich, dark, striped stuff, of which a larger pair nearly occupied one side of the room, partially looped up, showing a dark recess, The mantel-shelf was covered with green velvet, and displayed a very beautiful Louis Quatorze clock, and some vases of artificial flowers, while before the closed fireplace was a stand of living plants; a few pastels decorated the walls, and a large settee ran along the opposite side from the door.

Near this, in a high-backed antique chair, beside a small table which held a lamp, shaded by a fanciful coloured paper shade, and reading a "Journal" through a pair of gold-rimmed eyeglasses, which hung round her neck by a gold chain, sat a lady —an old lady, certainly, but seldom has age seemed so graceful. Her dress of deep, rich, soft, grey silk, fell in full folds, sweeping the ground picturesquely, the body and wide hanging sleeves shaded by abundance of delicate white lace. Her nearly white hair was dressed in three or four raised, frizzy curls over each temple, but drawn well back from the pale and still smooth forehead, a half-handkerchief of exquisite white lace with long ends was arranged with the most graceful carelessness across these undulating curls, the point secured to a narrow band of black velvet at the top of the brow, by a small brilliant diamond brooch; beneath—the eyebrows still dark—the eyes still keen, and until softened by words or smiles, somewhat fierce in their deep blackness, produced an almost startling effect from contrast. The jaw was large; the mouth, wide and tightly closed, when open, displayed the most triumphant array of teeth; the ends of the lace head-dress, tied loosely under the chin, hid the wrinkled throat, and completed a picture I have endeavoured to draw minutely, because Madame de Fontarce and her toilette were one and indivisible, and because this long description was taken in with one devouring glance by Madeline, whose first impression of her father's aunt was almost one of awe. What! this almost regal-looking woman, was she of her kith and kin? But as she stepped into the room Madame de Fontarce rose and came forward, not quickly, yet with a species of repressed warmth. "Mee poor child, you are welcome," she said, musically, yet with a strong Irish accent, strange to say, and extending a pair of still beautiful and jewelled, though somewhat wrinkled hands, took Madeline by both shoulders, and impressed a shadowy kiss first on one cheek and then on the other. Then still holding her, she put her back a little, and poured into her eyes a look so searching, a look so momentarily hard, that Madeline half shrank away. Then her whole countenance lit up with a smile of much sweetness, and she added: "Ah! yes, there is a shadow of my own youth here," and she passed her hand lightly over Madeline's blushing face. Our heroine now somewhat recovered herself, and by a natural and therefore touching impulse, raised Madame de Fontarce's hand in both her own, and tenderly kissed it.

"Thank God," she said, "I am with you at last, dear aunt."

"It is well," said her new found relative, with grave approbation, but of what Madeline did not feel very sure. "And how did my good Nathalie make you out?" she continued, still ad-

dressing Madeline, but smiling at that individual, who had remained, her hands in the pockets of her apron, calmly surveying the scene, as though a drama got up for her amusement. "*Eh, mon Dieu!*" she began, and then poured forth in a voluble flow, how she had placed herself by the exit, and recognising something of the tint and expression of Madame la Comtesse, something of the "air noble," in mademoiselle, in short something different from "*les autres demoiselles Anglaises*," she had therefore ventured to demand her name, and found she was the object of her search; and then she recounted that the little devil of a *concierge* had been reluctant to carry up the portmanteau, and therefore she had not offered him a "*pour boire*, until madame had given directions," upon which madame knitted her brows awfully, and then smiled and said, "but no, a *pour boire* for example! Had he not his New Year's gift," and then she said, "But the little one must want some supper; go then, good Nathalie, and bring supper. What will you like, my child, a fresh egg? ah! Nathalie, two fresh eggs and a bread, with a cup of coffee, that will not hinder sleep, which is the best restorer."

While madame spoke, she gently removed Madeline's bonnet and shawl with her own fair hands, and gave them to Nathalie, thereby conveying the idea of the tenderest consideration, and the utmost condescension. Then she made Madeline sit down on a footstool, and began to question her as to her journey; and especially on what terms she parted with Mrs. Redman—or the "respectable Redman," as Madame de Fontarce always termed her, to Madeline's great amusement. As the examination proceeded, Madeline felt how thoroughly, yet how politely, she was being sifted; but to this she had no objection, reflecting that to a friend, and a consummate gentlewoman, such as she enthusiastically considered her aunt to be, she could not be too frank. The appearance of Nathalie with a tray not unpleasantly interrupted the conversation; and when both eggs had disappeared, Madeline was nearly ashamed, especially when not a crumb of the *pain* was left. The coffee was delicious and sustaining; and Nathalie, who had looked on with much interest, seeing everything demolished, said aside to madame, "*Il y a encore a demi-tasse*," and disappeared with Madeline's cup.

"Now, my child, Nathalie will conduct you to your chamber, and to-morrow we will talk over our arrangements."

Here Nathalie interrupted her mistress by exclaiming, "*Tenez!* here is the purse of mademoiselle."

"Ah! it is well," said Madame de Fontarce, coolly holding out her jewelled hand; "give it to me. I take charge of it for you, little one," and Madeline, after receiving another shadowy

kiss, retired quite content. She was not quite so satisfied, however, when Nathalie conducted her into the vestibule, where darkness was made visible by a dim lamp; from this four doors opened, and Nathalie, turning a key in one of them, ushered Madeline into a long narrow chamber, without carpet or curtains, and neither very fresh or clean: at each end stood a narrow strip of a couch, both arranged for sleep.

"Mademoiselle will share my room," said the femme-de-chambre, "and as I rise early, she can have it to herself to make her toilette in the morning. Madame could not have anyone in her room, of course, and for a demoiselle to sleep alone is impossible, so Nathalie will take care of you. There is an *armoire*," opening a wide door in the hall, "but as you go so soon to the convent, it is not worth while to undo anything, so I have left your portmanteau in the vestibule."

Madeline, however, explained that she wanted some things out of it; the Bordelaise, therefore, good-humouredly held a candle while Madeline took out what she required, and prepared for rest as quickly as she could, for she was much exhausted—too much so to heed Nathalie's frank comments on the fashion of her under-garments, the shape of her boots. Then, after watching her at her prayers for a few minutes, her occupation seemed to suggest an idea to the femme-de-chambre, who, with an encouraging "*Allons donc*," rummaged out from a capacious pocket her beads, and dropping in an unconnected manner on the floor, began to patter her own prayers rapidly and energetically in a subdued tone. Then after seeing Madeline fairly in bed, she took the candle, and prepared to leave the room.

"Oh, stay!" said Madeline. "Will you not leave me the candle?"

"I shall be back directly I have attended the toilette of madame; and see, I lock this door we came in by; this," opening one between the two beds, "leads to my kitchen, and thence I can go to madame, so you will be quite safe till I come back;" so with a good-natured nod of the head Nathalie disappeared. For a moment or two Madeline could distinguish the light as Nathalie moved to and fro in the kitchen, for she had left the door open; then a lock turned, and the voice of Madame de Fontarce said, "Come here, Nathalie," upon which the light vanished; but Madeline was consoled by the feeling of being so close to her aunt. Several times before she got fairly off to sleep she was startled by the sound as of thunder rolling beneath her, so she concluded the room she was in was over the archway; she strove to think of the past day, and soon from confused thought passed into dreamless slumber.

How surprising it was to wake in the morning! how strange

all things seemed! yet she did not like the idea of being so soon immured in a convent school. Why could not her aunt allow her to have masters and remain with her? She was still a little bewildered and excited by the glimpse of another and a better world, afforded by the aristocratic elegance displayed by so near a relative as Madame de Fontarce. Was she really going to lead the life of a gentlewoman, and associate with gentry?—in other words, to realize her fondest dream, and that condition for which instinctively she felt she was especially fitted. However premature, caution told her not to build her hopes too high; she must place herself altogether in her aunt's hands. Madame de Fontarce gave the impression of despotism; not unpleasant despotism, it is true. Then Madeline turned from this idea and looked round her. Nathalie's bed was empty; there was no sign of her anywhere; so Madeline lay still, and waited the appearance of that functionary. Soon there were sounds of life in the kitchen, and Nathalie entered, looking somewhat coarser, and less picturesque, by day than by night.

"Good day, mademoiselle. Madame la Comtesse hopes mademoiselle has rested comfortably. Would mademoiselle have her *café au lait* and *petit pain* in bed?"

"No, thank you," cried Madeline, who shrank from the idea of such seeming luxury; "I shall not be a quarter of an hour dressing, and would rather go down to breakfast."

"As you will, mademoiselle," returned Nathalie, a little put out; "madame always has hers *au lit*."

Madeline, however, had slipped out of bed, and now, after a quick glance round, asked in some embarrassment for water, cold water.

"*Mais oui*, certainly;" only Nathalie did not think she would require it till she had breakfasted.

Madeline's toilette was speedily accomplished, and then finding the door leading to the vestibule still locked, she ventured to open that into the kitchen. This was the smallest apartment she had ever been in, and the stout form of Nathalie in addition to a tiny stove seemed to fill it up altogether. That genial personage was occupied in placing a napkin, a coffee-cup, and a *petit pain* on a microscopic table near one of the three doors which opened from this smallest of gastronomic temples.

"As mademoiselle is so resolved not to rest, I have put her coffee here; I can then attend to her and to madame, who is already up."

In effect, Madame de Fontarce summoned Nathalie five times by a little hand-bell while Madeline discussed her breakfast. That finished, she was conducted from the kitchen through

the vestibule into the saloon where she had seen her aunt the night before, and left to her own resources. So she looked round. There were some nicely-bound books—Racine, Molière, Lamartine's "Jocelyn," and others—and there were sundry card and counter boxes; divers romances, in yellow covers with queer names; some books of caricatures. Then the windows looked into a narrow street, with lofty, dark, oppressive houses opposite, and just one slanting ray of sunshine, in which the motes and dust floated, shone down between and lighted up two wretched-looking beings, ragged, dirty, degraded, yet picturesque, who were poking and rooting amid the small heaps of refuse which lay opposite each *porte cochère*. A gentlemanlike looking man, with a sword and cocked hat, and the air of a general officer, was conversing affably with Monsieur Le Concierge on the opposite side of the way. Madeline recognized the latter immediately, and while she looked the cocked-hatted man raised his eyes and caught hers, and then the concierge looked, and they spoke earnestly. She could not help fancying it was about her, and then Madame de Fontarce said close behind her in French: "My child, we do not consider it seemly in France for a demoiselle to gaze at passers-by from the window."

"What nonsense," thought Madeline. "I am glad you told me," she said; "I should never have thought it was wrong."

"No," said her aunt. "The system in England is very different. I do not say it is worse or better, but you will find that doing in Paris what Parisians do will simplify life very much. But have you rested well, my little one?" continued madame, embracing her; "I have risen thus early for we have much to do this morning."

Madame de Fontarce was enveloped in a *robe de chambre* of violet merino (the mornings were chilly), and had a morning cap of the same shape as the one she wore on Madeline's arrival, only of white muslin, with narrow Valenciennes edging. She looked more deadly white and her eyes more deeply black than the night before; nevertheless she might still have been a model of dress and deportment.

"You are too good," murmured Madeline, with genuine gratitude. "How troublesome I am!"

Madame de Fontarce smiled, and looked keenly into Madeline's eyes. Then she called Nathalie, and directed her to open the portmanteau and remove its contents into her *cabinet de toilette*, and let her know when that was done. "Give Nathalie your keys, dear child," she said; "she is the best being, the truest and most devoted."

"Still," said Madeline, stoutly, "I should like to unpack my own box. *You*, dear aunt, can see everything."

"I thought," returned Madame de Fontarce, "that you might employ the time better in writing to the good grandmamma."

"That will not take much time," returned Madeline; "nor unpacking my portmanteau either, if Nathalie will kindly help me," she added with a smile that mollified that important personage.

"So be it," said madame, and soon the whole of Madeline's treasures were displayed.

The *cabinet de toilette*, though small, was considerably larger than the kitchen (between which and the recess containing madame's ornamental couch, shrouded by the *portière* Madeline noticed on her arrival, it intervened); and when Nathalie had assisted to lay her belongings on the two chairs and a long ottoman, which was in reality a cap box, at a nod from her mistress she retired. Madeline took a small paper packet from a box of especial treasures, and handed it to her aunt. "Mrs. Redman," she said, "desired me to give that to you with her compliments. It contains, I believe, six pounds and five shillings—a quarter's allowance for my dress; and I do trust, my dear aunt, that you will tell me when and how I can by my own work, in making or altering dresses, help to make myself less expensive to you."

"You are a good child, Madeline," returned Madame de Fontarce graciously. "Let me see—a Bank of England note, a sovereign, and two half-crowns—oh, that is right. Now, the little *porte-monnai* Nathalie handed me last night contained three sovereigns and a piece of ten francs. Now I will keep this for you, and make you a monthly allowance; for you will only be permitted to have a certain allowance where I am going to send you;" and Madame de Fontarce, leaning back in a *fauteuil*, proceeded to unfold her plans to her deeply interested listener. She had with much difficulty and great interest procured Madeline's admission into the convent school of the Annonciads—one of the most exclusive and renowned establishments in Paris. It had always been Buonaparte in politics, consequently madame's friends were much connected with it. Now, more than ever, did all parents of consideration seek to place their daughters there, as it was specially protected by the great man who then ruled France. "Your age," continued Madame de Fontarce, "was an obstacle at first, as it was supposed, coming from an English school, you would be an embittered Protestant, and seek to introduce those doctrines amongst your companions. I, however, asserted that you were ready to be reconciled to the religion of your forefathers, from which the bigotry of a fanatic grandmother had torn you. You will, therefore, my child, carry out my representation, by swimming with the current of opinion

in your new domicile;" and madame paused for a reply, looking keenly into Madeline's eyes as she did so.

"But, Madame," said Madeline, "my father was a Protestant, at least he used occasionally to take me to church; and though I used to feel tired and angry at all the abuse which the clergymen at Clapham were constantly bestowing on Roman Catholics, I am not at all inclined to become one."

"Do I ask you to do so?" replied her aunt, knitting her brows.

"But," argued the niece, "will it not be false to let them think me one of themselves, when I am not?"

"I should never recommend treachery," said Madame de Fontarce, dryly, "but I *do* recommend the wisdom of silence. When asked directly, you must always say you have been brought up a Protestant; but the less you say the better; comply with the rules and customs of the house which so liberally shelters you, and whatever may be your convictions, you will not be the worse Christian, as I understand the doctrines of that religion. Please to remember, also, that your future depends a good deal upon me, and, with every inclination to love and cherish you, I will not bear much opposition;" concluded Madame la Comtesse, with a lightning in the eye, and compression of the lip, that told of a firm will and a high temper.

"Dear Madame," said Madeline, a kindred spirit rousing within her, and in no way awed by her aunt's sudden imperiousness, "I shall ever do more to win your love than to avoid your anger."

"Ha! you are of my own calibre, I imagine," returned the old lady, resting her head on her hand, and leaning forward towards the fair pale slight speaker—"then love me, be guided by me, little one, and I shall lead you to a pleasanter life than the Redman grandmother ever could. No matter! we must not displease her. Now tell me of her, and her surroundings."

Madeline gave a short sketch of the Redman family, and her own introduction to them. At the description of the state of destitution in which she had been left, Madame de Fontarce frowned, and muttered some inarticulate French ejaculation, which had very much the tone of an imprecation. However, she made no remark, except to say, "These domestic sores need never be exhibited to indifferent persons. I suppose, even in your Clapham school, you learned that school-girls are not very delicate or sympathetic. Leave the account of your father's circumstances to me. And now I shall pack away your dresses; they will be of no use to you at the convent."

There were one or two points in the comtesse's speeches that dwelt in Madeline's memory. First, she spoke of the convent as

"the house which so liberally shelters you." Was it, then, a charity school? Secondly, she mentioned Christianity as "that religion;" as though she classed it in her own mind with half-a-dozen others! How was this? Her experience as yet had only revealed two classes of minds—the Evangelical, or whitewashed school, and the high church encaustic mediæval school—neither of whom applied the epithet Christian to the other; but of anything outside them being considered a religion, she never dreamed.

But Madame roused her from her reflections, by informing her, that after the second *déjeuner* she would take her to the Tuileries gardens, and afterwards to the Champs Elysées, in order that she might form some ideas of Paris before entering the convent-school, which would be the following day.

CHAPTER IX.

SHORT as Madeline's stay had been in the Rue St. Pierre, she felt strangely reluctant to leave it—to be again uprooted and placed in what she imagined would be conventual imprisonment.

But she said nothing of this, and submissively followed Madame de Fontarce into the well-appointed *remise*, which the old lady had hired; a small box, containing all of Madeline's belongings that she was allowed to take with her, confided to the coachman's care—and away they drove through fairyland. Paris quite fulfilled Madeline's expectations. She had no idea, previously, of how much beauty stone and mortar are capable; and as they drove leisurely (after the fashion of Parisian *remises*), first through narrow streets, bordered by lofty mysterious-looking houses, then past a lovely Grecian temple, which was, her aunt informed her, the Church of the Madeleine; across the Place de la Concorde, with its fountains and statues; over the bridge, and away along the *quais* towards the Invalides, the whole scene bright with sunshine and clear air, she could not help exclaiming, "How shall I ever tolerate London after this?"

"It will depend a good deal on yourself whether you return there or not," returned her aunt significantly.

They now left the pleasant line of the *quais*, and struck into some of the narrow gloomy streets of the Faubourg St. Germain. After many complicated turnings, they stopped at a door in a long dead wall. The door was furnished with a long iron bell-handle, which hung at the side, and a *grille*. Madame de Fontarce, availing herself, in a dignified way, of the support of Madeline's arm, descended from the carriage, and rang the bell; almost immediately the board at the back of the *grille* was

drawn back, displaying the round good-natured, but somewhat solemn face of an elderly female, framed in a curious array of what seemed, to Madeline, white linen bandages. Some murmured questions and answers passed between the gatekeeper and the countess, then there was a rattle as of ponderous keys, and the gate was opened, revealing the full figure of its guardian, in her black habit and curious head gear, with its half moon of white linen descending from the chin to the breast. She was a stout, broad-shouldered woman, and took Madeline's box from the coachman with the ease of strength.

"Enter then, Madame and Mademoiselle," she said, "the good mother will be so content to welcome another sweet young lamb. She expected you before vespers." And Madeline followed her aunt into a large semi-circular space.

In the centre stood a large square mansion, with a steep roof and high chimneys, and long narrow windows, not the least like Madeline's idea of a convent. Right and left of this, stretched in a curve, a sort of open gallery, with pillars in front, and a white wall behind them, forming a covered approach to the house. Before the entrance was a fountain, which played with a pleasant murmur, and as the street without was a small unimportant alley, removed from any great thoroughfare, a sudden sense of silence, coolness and repose, fell upon the spirit on entering, as though the world were indeed shut out. As they advanced a nun came suddenly through a small iron gate at the opposite side, which permitted a delicious peep of grass and foliage with the sun upon it. She wore the same garb as the janitor, with the addition of a broad red ribbon, which sloped to a point from her shoulders to her waist, where it terminated in a silver cross. Her hands were folded in her wide sleeves, and she glided rapidly, yet softly, across the court yard, and vanished through a gate similar to that by which she entered.

All seemed captivating to Madeline's imagination, yet she felt dimly alarmed—Clapham having so far entered into her soul as to suggest ideas of being perpetually immured—of being bound hand and foot by some awful conclave of ecclesiastics.

"But at least," she whispered to herself, "if I am, I shall never see my grandmother, and that is something!"

At the entrance of the house they were met by a nun, or the nun she had seen cross the court yard, and after a ceremonious greeting between Madame la Comtesse, she informed them that the Mother Abbess was ready to receive them. Crossing a spacious and superbly *parquéd* hall, the nun opened a door, and ushered them through a long gallery-like room, to a small octagon chamber, panelled and simply painted. It had no carpet, save a small oblong island of a rug, which lay before a long

settee, or *canapé*, covered with faded, but exquisitely clean chintz; a few chairs of a common description, and one small table, completed the furniture. A jar, containing a rose tree in full bearing, decorated the empty fire-place, and the lofty carved wood mantel-piece was crowned with a large bunch of flowers in an old china vase, the whole surmounted by a large ebony crucifix, with an exquisitely carved white marble Christ. Madeline scanned these details with deep, though brief attention. This little octagon room, which looked almost like a well from its disproportioned height, was yet cheerful, for one of the octagons was occupied by a window-door, which was open, showing a large garden, with old trees, and a wealth of light and shade. Madeline kept profound silence, while her aunt and the nun conversed for a few minutes in what seemed a rapid and bewildering manner, and then the *religieuse* withdrew.

"Now, Madeline," said Madame de Fontarce, "you understand French sufficiently to follow and comprehend what I shall say to the good Mother, and I hope sufficient tact to carry out my views. Attend to my observations, they are intended as a guide to you."

Before Madeline could reply, a panelled door, so like the rest of the wall, opened slowly, and a tall slender figure, in the religious habit, entered.

A pale, pure, marbly face, with delicate features, and large dark brown dreamy eyes, looked out of the hard white linen frame of the conventual head dress. The thick black inflexible habit, and thick veil, could not altogether hide the slope of the shoulders, and gentle pride of carriage. The little hands, softly laid in each other, though thin, were delicately formed, and all through the strange dress Madeline could perceive a gentlewoman.

A rosary hung at her side, and from her shoulders a long flat white scarf. The firmness of the mouth contracted the softness of the eyes, yet there was an indescribable charm about the Mother Abbess of the Annonciade, which Madeline's nature was quick to perceive. She produced a strange effect upon the little ex-Claphamite—this fair woman thus cut for ever off from the natural joys and hopes of life. She seemed to bring with her an aroma of religious exaltation.

Madame de Fontarce greeted her with profound respect, and received with an air of the deepest reverence the benediction (it seemed to Madeline), gently but clearly uttered by the abbess.

"I have brought you this dear child, Madame Mère," said the countess, drawing Madeline forward, "thankful to rescue the last scion of our house from heretical influences. To you I confide her, knowing you will leave her young mind free to make its own choice."

The abbess placed both her hands on Madeline's head, and then kissing her on each cheek, bade her welcome, and blessed her.

A long desultory conversation ensued, in the course of which Madeline learned, to her great surprise, that her father had suffered much persecution, and lost his estates principally by his loving tendency to the faith of his fathers. Madame did not distinctly assert that he was a Catholic, indeed she did not assert anything; but she produced a certain impression, while she left herself perfectly free to deny ever having stated anything in particular on any point.

Madeline felt rather indignant at this mystification of so lofty and captivating a personage as the abbess; but when Madame de Fontarce, turning suddenly to herself said, with a slight quiver of the voice and air of tender emotion, "You were too young, my child, to know of all this, and my late nephew, your father, was too anxious to shield his daughter from all he had himself suffered, to venture on withdrawing you from the Church of England."

At this Madeline began to think her aunt might be speaking truth all the time. What did she know of her father's antecedents?

"Believe me, madame," said the abbess, "we will cherish this dear child, and seek to make her one of Jesus' lambs." A good deal of undertoned talk was then exchanged, which Madeline avoided hearing, from an honourable feeling, moving away to the window.

Then Madame de Fontarce arose, and embracing her niece said, "Adieu, dear child! be diligent, be obedient, and above all, grateful for God's goodness which has placed you in such care as this," pointing to the abbess. "I shall have a letter from you once a month, and take you out for an occasional holiday as shall be permitted and arranged;" then curtsying low, with dignified grace, she left the room.

When Madeline found herself alone with this cold composed woman, a sudden desperate sense of isolation and helplessness, such as in her worst times in England she had never known, pressed upon her with terrible weight. She stood where her aunt had left her, her eyes bent to the ground, feeling that those of the abbess were fixed on her. Then the low clear voice of the *religieuse* fell upon her ear. "You would like to join your new companions in the garden?"

Madeline looked up with a troubled wistful expression, and the abbess stretched out her arms, drawing her gently to her, whispered, "Trust in me, my child! I will be your mother; you are received as a child in this the household of God; you leave

sorrow and uncertainty outside its walls;" and Madeline returned a slight embrace with grateful fervour.

Then the mother rang a little hand bell, and on the entrance of a nun, whom she called Sister Angela, gave Madeline to her care.

The sister took her by the hand, and led her up a grand, wide, dark, oak staircase, to a great gallery; from this gallery the dormitories opened; eight boarders slept in each dormitory, and two nuns who, to use a military phrase, were told off at stated times, so that the pupils were constantly under supervision. Between every two beds was a sort of low wardrobe, with a drawer below and two shelves. The top of this *armoire* served as a wash-stand and toilet-table, and one side of the room was occupied by a row of tall windows, the lower halves of which were painted white; this inclined Madeline to think they overlooked the street. The nun who had conducted her was a broad-faced, kindly, common-place woman, not deficient in manner, but strangely childish, either in her own nature, or in her conception of that of her companion.

Madeline was nevertheless delighted with all she saw, because it was so unlike Clapham and Abingdon Villas. There was something in the atmosphere of the place so utterly removed from the common-place of life as she had hitherto known it. While she thought thus, in a vague, undefined manner, two lay sisters entered, carrying her box, which was unscrupulously opened before her eyes, the good nuns becoming quite excited in the examination of garments so different in shape and style from the *lingerie* of young French girls: among other objects of interest they discovered the fondly-cherished miniature of her father, on which they pounced with lively curiosity, discovering the likeness to Madeline, and plying her with numerous questions.

At last Madeline's conductress exclaimed, "Hold, there! We forget the time! The robe of mademoiselle must be tried on." Whereupon one of the lay sisters left the dormitory for a moment, and returned with a partly-made grey dress over her arm. This, Madeline was informed, was the uniform of the convent; it was of thin, cool texture, and on Sundays was, they told her, adorned with a broad blue sash over the right shoulder, and fastening under the left arm. This was worn by every boarder, from the heiress of a dukedom to the daughter of the humblest *sous* officer taken from charity, only in this instance the dress was provided at the expense of the convent.

Madeline was delighted with the rule. She remembered the toilettes of the young ladies at Miss Jones's, and the heartburnings that resulted therefrom.

After declaring that the *corsage à l'enfant* would do admirably, the sisters clothed Madeline once more in her own dress, and then Sister Angela said, "It is almost four o'clock, the dear children will have their refection, and then there is an hour's recreation; come, they long to welcome their Irish sister." Again taking her by the hand, she led Madeline down another and less noble staircase, to some large apartments, opening into each other, on the ground floor. These looked into the gardens, and were used for the different classes, each presided over by a nun. At this hour there was quite a buzz of youthful voices, for the pupils were seated at long tables, where plates loaded with bread and butter, alternated with dishes of fresh fruit, diversified with *carafes* of water. All the girls at the table to which Madeline was conducted rose, and those nearest kissed and welcomed her, while the presiding nun received her with almost motherly tenderness. The bright sunlight played on some large trees far off in the garden; but the room was in shade, and Madeline greatly enjoyed the cool and delicious fruit which was most hospitably pressed upon her. It was a curious scene to her eye. The boarders all in grey, with their dark hair drawn closely back, and fastened in a roll at the back. The faces sallow, dark-eyed, eager (with few exceptions); the gentle, placid nuns in the picturesque garb of their profession; all so unlike the life she had left, and therefore attractive in its newness.

A slight lingering uneasiness still disturbed her, lest she might be called upon to choose between denying her religion, or disobliging her aunt. However, she possessed the happy and often useful (if not carried too far) Irish faculty of postponing unpleasant reflection, and so gave herself up to the present. Her imperfect French was a source of delight and amusement to the pupils and the nuns also; but it was amusement without one spice of malice, and Madeline heartily shared in it.

After the light repast, the boarders led Madeline into the gardens or grounds of the convent, which seemed quite a domain to our little heroine. Here they played *les graces* and various games; and most of the girls had small gardens, in which they were permitted to plant what they liked, and proud was the successful cultivator who could supply a handful of mustard or cress, or radish, to the daily salad.

There was something singularly different in the caressing, almost infantile, sweetness with which Madeline was received by her new companions, compared with the hardened gossipry and precocious worldliness of the old ones. It is true that the boarders were never for a moment free from surveillance, though very tenderly exercised. This Madeline afterwards found a little irksome; but at first, with the haste of youth, she was quite

ready to believe both teachers and pupils angels, and to exclaim: "And oh! if there be an elysium on earth, it is this, it is this."

At seven o'clock the pupils were recalled to the class-room, and prepared lessons for the next day till eight.

During this hour a nun, who seemed to take the principal direction, examined Madeline as to her acquirements, in order, she said, to assign her a class. On some points Madeline's information surprised her interrogator, on others she seemed backward. But nothing could be kinder or more motherly than the mode and tone of the examination. At eight a bell rang, and prayers were read in French by Sister Angela. Then all ascended to the dormitories, and another nun, one of those who slept in the same room, read aloud a portion of the life of some saint of whom Madeline had never heard before, and except for the religious phrases, might have passed as an extract from the Arabian nights, or any other collection of fairy tales, while the girls undressed.

Madeline lay long awake. Here she was again afloat. Yet the idea of being a waif and a stray did not afflict her as it did the night of her arrival at Miss Jones's academy. No, it produced a weary, depressed feeling, but she had got used to it, and at any rate her present quarters were infinitely preferable. At five next morning the young sleepers were roused by a nun calling in a sort of singing tone that it was time to rise, and after a hasty toilette they descended to the principal class-room, where prayers were read by the mistress. Then a breakfast of bread and milk was served, after which study commenced, and continued for what seemed but a short time to Madeline. She was examined in music, and she enjoyed the method of instruction adopted. Then they were summoned to mass, which was performed in a small chapel by a little plump, rosy, pleasant-looking priest, who, after it was over (and very strange it seemed to Madeline) came into the class and bestowed his blessing upon her, questioning her playfully, as you might a child of eight or ten. Just before leaving he said: "And you have been a little stray lamb, but now brought back into the true fold; dear children, you must say three Ave Marias and four Paternosters, for four nights, that this sweet daughter may be truly reunited to Christ's church." And he left the class, all rising and standing till he had disappeared. This was the first, and, for many months, the last, allusion to her religion that Madeline heard. Her ignorance of the rules and formulas of Catholicism was taken or treated as a matter of course, and instructions gently given, so she passed with the rest, unquestioned.

From mass till half-past nine, about an hour, the boarders played or walked in the garden, when studies were resumed

(after a collation of more bread and milk, this time varied with butter) and continued till eleven, when dinner was served in a large room termed the refectory. It was a most excellent repast, well-cooked, and neatly served. During its progress Madame la bonne Mère made her appearance, and walked round the table, asking occasionally for a morsel of one dish or another, and speaking to the boarders on various subjects. She especially noticed Madeline, even asking affectionately if she had slept well.

From dinner-time till two recreation, and then study till four, and so on, the previous evening being repeated.

And soon, very soon, Madeline fell into the routine, soon the various forms of worship became familiar, and the intricacies of the catechism (taught for half an hour every afternoon) ceased to excite surprise, and became a rather sleepy monotony.

Over this period of Madeline's story, denuded as it was of events, we must not linger, too much remains to be told. Yet in the history of her mind it was a very important one. The extreme kindness and gentleness with which the pupils were treated almost reconciled her to the childishness of the system in many respects; though study was not a little wearisome, restricted as it was on all sides by the fear of trenching on forbidden ground.

Music, grammar (French of course), and Latin. In these alone could she go as far as she liked, and they were admirably taught; church music delighted her, and her proficiency was a source of the greatest pride to her instructress. For secular music, first-rate music and singing masters were allowed to give lessons, by which Madeline largely profited.

The first enchantment of course wore off. Black sheep showed themselves among the angelic host, but few and far between.

What mostly pressed upon, and at times almost irritated Madeline, was the unrelaxed efforts to keep all the girls babies, to fetter free thought, and yet so twine the chains with flowers that they should not be perceived. Yet scarce a day passed that she did not acknowledge the excellence of the system in many ways —the softening, refining influence, the gentle sunshine which pervaded the whole establishment, and was certainly far more impressed with grand, loving influence of Christ's doctrines than the Calvinistic gloom of Clapham.

This constant balance of feeling stamped her mind with an indelible impress of liberality, not favourable either to the Church of Rome or the Church of England, but eminently to the Church of Jesus Christ.

At rare intervals Madame de Fontarce took her out for a short holiday, commencing at noon—when Nathalie would call for and escort her to the Rue St. Pierre, sometimes walking, and

sometimes in omnibus—and terminating about six o'clock, when she would be dispatched, to be in time for evening prayers.

These treats were not of an exciting description. The day was generally passed in reading the various odd volumes of modern novels which lay on madame's table, and which, certes, gave a very different view of life from the literature of the convent, and in hearing scraps of talk from madame's various visitors. Madeline continued to admire and love her aunt, who showed a great interest in her progress, especially in music, and expressed unbounded satisfaction on finding her so great a favourite with her fellow pupils and teachers.

"My child! to know and practise the wisdom of silence at your age is worth a fortune. You now pass for a good Catholic, and you may be one for what I know."

"But I am not," Madeline returned; "nor do I think I ever shall, though I like them so much."

"*N'importe,*" returned the countess, pleasantly. "Never shock the prejudices of your associates. People may forgive serious injuries, but not the rejection of their delusions."

When Madame de Fontarce was unusually well and good-humoured, she would, perhaps, take Madeline to the Champs Elysées to see the carriages pass, which, in the monotony of her life, was really an excitement to Madeline.

So time slipped by. One of our heroine's real pleasures was to converse with M. Duseautoir, the priest or chaplain of the convent. He was an accomplished, polished, keen-witted man, who partly fathomed the quiet depths of Madeline's somewhat uncommon nature. She was a great favourite of his, though she never availed herself of the privilege of confession, save on those rare occasions when the rite was compulsory on the boarders. He alone cross-examined her on her faith, and pressed her to avow her renunciation of Protestant error. This she evaded by stating her mind to be not yet sufficiently ripe, and perhaps unconsciously fearing a contrary declaration to what he wished, the good priest refrained from pressing her. Moreover, he really became attached to his little Irish lamb, and gratified by her quick, intelligent appreciation of himself and his conversation, as he afterwards proved.

With her school-companions Madeline was very popular, and liked them in return, but found none to replace Jessie Moorcroft as a friend; none with sufficient equality of mind, or, perhaps, sufficient experience of life, to be really companionable. They were such babies, these great girls—and yet, married and launched into the world, what shrewd social divinities they become.

So autumn darkened and deepened into winter, the hour of

rising was postponed from five to six. The grey uniform was changed for warm black cloth; the dressing of a baby Christ, and laying it in a toy manger, sent half the boarders wild with excitement. One or two of the elder girls were withdrawn to be married, though the young ladies knew nothing about it till some months after, when "Julie," their former playmate, returned to see them as "Madame La Marquise," in a superb toilette, and apparently metamorphosed into a woman of the world.

And spring came round with startling rapidity, and Madeline, seeing her first year approach its termination, began to think of telling Madame de Fontarce she had nearly exhausted the convent reservoir of knowledge, and must think of doing something for herself.

CHAPTER X.

It was not Madame de Fontarce's intention, however, to give Madeline her liberty. "You must stay where you are some months yet," she said; "I have certain designs for your welfare, which you must leave to me." So Madeline stayed. When spending a day with her aunt, that lady generally made her write a polite letter to Mrs. Redman, and permitted one to Miss Foster occasionally, always asking to read it, to which Madeline had no objection. Her liking for her aunt, her appreciation of the convent, gave a genuine tone to the composition, which usually drew forth short but emphatic praise from that astute gentlewoman. The replies to these, always from Miss Foster, generally reached her long after date, and with the cover open. This, Madame de Fontarce explained, by observing that it would not do to give her the letter in the convent, and therefore she opened it to see there was nothing in it that required immediate attention. All seemed well in Madeline's eyes. But Mrs. Redman, harsh and oppressive as she was, would never have dreamed of opening her granddaughter's letters. The English recognition of individual rights, so long as those rights do not trench on any one else's pocket, would have restrained her.

One morning Madeline was summoned to the presence of the abbess, a rare event, for *la bonne mère* seldom interfered in details, and was only appealed to in extreme cases of good or evil.

The abbess looked stern, she held a letter.

"Speak truth, my child," she said, and paused.

"Yes, without doubt," returned Madeline, looking straight into her eyes.

"Do you know that writing?" holding out a note.

"But—yes, certainly," cried Madeline, her face lighting up with pleasure. "It is from a former schoolfellow, the only friend I had at that miserable English school, where I suffered so much," and our little heroine threw perhaps more repugnance into her expression than she absolutely felt, so producing an excellent effect on the abbess.

"I must keep the letter till Sister Mary Zaveria can come and translate it, meantime do you read it to me, my child."

"Versailles, Sept. 20th.

"DEAREST MADELINE,

"I have never been able to answer your dear letter that you sent me from Madame de Fontarce's, but now I am going home in a few days, and should like so much to see you. May I come, and at what time? Will the nuns let Sam in, for he has come to fetch me? I cannot go to you without him, and it would not be very pleasant for him to wait in the street. Direct to me at the Hotel d'Angleterre, Rue de M——. I shall be in Paris on Wednesday, and only stay till Friday morning. How I wish you were coming back with me!

"Ever your own attached,

"JESSIE."

When Madeline had finished a rapid translation she exclaimed with clasped hands, "Oh, do! do Madame Mère let her, I shall perhaps never see her again! and I should like her to see this charming place and the garden, and the chapel, for she, poor girl, has only been to a Lutheran *pension* at Versailles."

The abbess smiled, "But yes!" she said, "you can see your friend, you may even show her that which your tender soul most admires; and the brother, he may await you in the parlour."

"Oh, thank you! thank you, *bonne mère*," cried Madeline, "then I may write to her now, to-morrow you know will be Wednesday."

"*Tenez!*" cried the abbess, "you go too quick, we must await Sister Mary Zaveria, that I may know what you write."

"I can write in French *bonne mère*, my friend will understand." So Madeline got her note written, and the convent messenger, one of the few males permitted to do its service, was despatched to post it.

The next day, at the four o'clock refection, visitors for Mademoiselle Madeline were announced, and Madeline, who had been permitted, nay encouraged, to put on her blue scarf, sash, &c., escorted by Sister Mary Zaveria, descended to the same little octagon chamber where she had first been received.

There she was heartily hugged and kissed by Jessie, and saluted with much respect and some awe by Mr. Sam Moorcroft, who, in one of those rampant check travelling suits, in which even the most steady and business-like Britons delight to array themselves when escaping the trammels of the City, appeared an object of the most intense curiosity to the quiet nun acting duenna. On introduction she murmured a religious salutation, under the influence of which Mr. Sam sat down uneasily on the edge of a wooden chair.

"How well you are looking, dear," said Jessie, gazing affectionately at her friend.

"Yes indeed!" murmured Mr. Sam admiringly.

"Well Jessie, you look over-worked or something, pale and thin."

"Not over-fed, at all events," said Jessie laughing, and then rushed into a torrent of "abuse," if Jessie's voluble but weakly expressions may be so termed, of the food, the dirt, the discipline, the teaching, everything.

"Hush dear, the good sister understands," said Madeline, fearing she might be hurt at this disparagemnt of her nation, and she was listening attentively, but no! was it not all spoken against a Protestant *pension*.

Meantime Mr. Sam, hearing that the picturesque-looking female in the white card-board hood understood English, endeavoured to make himself agreeable by praising the house and garden, and conjecturing its probable value as building-ground.

Then Jessie informed Madeline that she was returning thus soon, because Miss Jones had found an engagement for her in a clergyman's family somewhere near Hastings, and she was to go direct there, but to have a fortnight's holiday at Christmas to see her mother, with many details too small for notice, though interesting to her hearer.

Then Sam was left to amuse himself by looking out of the window while Sister Mary Zaveria and Madeline led Jessie all through the establishment, round the garden, and into the classes, to that young lady's reluctant admiration and bewilderment.

On their return they found Mr. Sam slightly stupefied by inaction, and then Sister Mary Zaveria requested them to partake of a little collation, and conducted them into another room, also looking on the garden, where Madeline had never been before, where bread and butter, biscuits, fruit, and coffee (first-rate coffee Mr. Sam said) were laid out. So the visit ended, with many embraces and a few tears, the friends not knowing when they might meet again.

Mr. S. Moorcroft was greatly struck by the change and improvement in Madeline, the soft high-bred tone she had acquired.

"I say, Jessie, when she speaks and brightens up she looks downright beautiful for a minute or two; I never saw such a pair of eyes."

He was a good deal struck by Sister Mary Zaveria also, and in speaking afterwards of that memorial visit, usually mentioned her as "a jolly party for a nun."

Winter again darkened over Madeline in the convent still; and as she found more and more the insufficiency of the life she led, she pondered deeply over the probabilities of her future. What did her áunt intend to do with her? For, in spite of her love and admiration for the accomplished countess, little traits and tiny revelations had come to her, bit by bit, until she had made out a mosaic of her character not very dissimilar to the original. It had somehow come to her knowledge that for her board and education in the convent that amiable person did not pay one sous, some benefactor having given madame what in England we should call a presentation,—her very uniform was provided. Likewise, the countess's ardour for Catholicism generally faded away in proportion to her distance from the convent and Père Duseautoir (who, by the way, was Madame de Fontarce's *directeur*). Madeline was a little shocked to think that her aunt had imposed on the Redman faction. It was a breach of good faith, she thought, even while her pearly teeth showed through lips parted in a slight smile at the neatness of the ruse.

"Why not say honestly that she had the power of placing me *en pension* here; it would really have come to the same thing." And the smile faded away into a little sigh that she should thus criticise the conduct of one so pleasant and so kind.

In the early days of March, Madame de Fontarce surprised Madeline with a letter from Jessie Moorcroft (brought to the convent, too), containing the startling intelligence that she was going to be married. It was a sweet, womanly letter, mixed with gentle exultation in the man who had chosen her, and tender regret for the dear mother she was to leave. Mr. Arthur Downing had been a schoolfellow of Sam's, and was now a civil engineer; such a genteel profession, and his name, too! Didn't dear Madeline think it very nice. Indeed, he was quite a gentleman. She had known him long ago; but during the Christmas holidays they had seen a great deal of him; and about three weeks ago he had proposed. They were to be married in a month, and then go to Liverpool, where he had an appointment, the distance being the greatest drawback.

"A schoolfellow of Mr. Moorcroft's," said Madeline, meditatively. "Then he cannot be nice enough for Jessie."

"Why not?" asked her aunt. "What was her father?"

"A managing clerk in some large firm, I believe."

"Then it is a step in advance, and perfectly suitable," said Madame de Fontarce decidedly, and with perfect approbation. "Remember, her standard may not be yours; indeed, I would advise you not to set up too high a standard yourself, but write and congratulate your friend at once; write also to the mother, and say I am charmed to hear the happy news—something civil; let me see what you write."

Not long after, Madame de Fontarce announced her intention of removing Madeline early in April; and much regret was expressed, both by teachers and pupils, at the prospect of losing a dear companion and the most successful student of music in the school. There was a little *fête* given in her honour; and Madeline felt (for a moment) ready to give up her emancipation, and stay a while longer with them. But the countess's arrangements were Mede and Persian in their fixity. On the appointed day the nuns packed her clothes. Nathalie appeared *en fiacre*, and she was pronounced ready.

On the whole, Madeline was sorry, when the moment of parting came, to bid the kind nuns, her instructresses, and her childish, yet *précoce*, companions farewell. Much had there been in the school of the Annonciades to chafe her, and some things that moved her keen though quiet sense of the ridiculous; yet on the whole she had been happy there, for she felt she had been valued at something like her worth. Moreover, she was especially proud of Père Duseautoir's friendship. To find such a man ready and pleased to converse with her gratified her intellectual pride, and was eminently useful in raising her in her aunt's estimation, success of some kind being essential in that shrewd lady's mind as a hall-mark of merit.

Nathalie was enchanted to escort her once more for a permanent residence to the Rue St. Pierre.

"Madame la Comtesse," she said, "was not so strong as formerly, nor so bright; she required the society of a charming demoiselle like yourself. But madame was always seeking to do mademoiselle good! Even now she was revolving a project—ah! a superb project! but then it was not for Nathalie to speak;" and she paused to be questioned.

Madeline, busy with her own thoughts, did not care to hear anything about this project; nevertheless, not to disappoint her ally, she said—

"What can it be, Nathalie?"

"Ah! that is the secret which I must not reveal. Madame, in good time, will tell mademoiselle all about it."

"Unkind Nathalie," said Madeline, smiling.

It was more than six months since she had visited her aunt, and for half that time she had not seen her; she was, therefore, more alive to an indefinable change in Madame de Fontarce than the femme-de-chambre.

Her aunt seemed much aged—her eyes less bright—her manner more irritable,—though this last a stranger would hardly discover. Moreover, there was more of tenderness in her bearing towards Madeline than she had ever shown before. Madeline was also surprised and delighted to find a piano occupying a corner in her aunt's *salon;* she would not now find the evenings hang heavily, when she was left alone.

Madame de Fontarce, however, seemed little changed in habits, and as usual, dressed in the evening to attend some reception, or card party.

"To-morrow, *ma bien amie,*" she said, "I have a treat in store for you. I have promised an esteemed lady of my acquaintance that you shall accompany her to the Variétés, and I well know how you love the drama; so this evening you will assist Nathalie to complete a little toilette of muslin and ribbon—very simple, and I think suitable—which I have designed for you, but could not finish without your presence."

"How good of you, dear aunt, to think so much of me," cried Madeline, kissing her hand; "you are like a mother to me; and that piano! I know you have gone to the expense of hiring it for my benefit."

"*Fi donc, petite chatte,*" said Madame de Fontarce, with the sweetest air of playful benevolence, "do not call me to account for my imprudences; but could I let thee lose the result of all thy study, for the sake of a few francs?"

The affectionate old lady did not mention that she was provided for this outlay by the savings effected from Madeline's toilette allowance—a very legitimate way of spending it; but she might have admitted the fact! Strange influence of heart; this adamantine woman of the world wished to possess the character of a tender and generous benefactress in the eyes of her dependent young kinswoman; and yet she had looked to make a tool of this young creature, should an opportunity ever offer; and though she liked her better, perhaps, than any other living creature, she would not hesitate to sacrifice her at any moment. But Madeline knew nothing of all this; and the warmest feelings in her heart glowed for this polished piece of flint, who yet had been very serviceable to her.

"And who is the lady, may I ask, dear aunt?"

"Certainly; Madame Delille, a rather new acquaintance. She is the wife of an ex-sous préfet, *assez riche,* but an excellent person; not *de la haute noblesse,* 'tis true—nevertheless admira-

ble. Now I must leave you, my child, to Nathalie! we will have a long talk to-morrow."

Madeline rather enjoyed her evening's work; the occupation of trying on the very gracefully-designed dress was delightful, and Nathalie's exclamations of admiration music to ears little accustomed to such sounds; "and madame, too, would be so delighted."

The next day Madame de Fontarce was later in making her appearance than usual; but sent a message to Madeline not to refrain from playing the piano if she was so inclined, and of this permission she availed herself. At last Madame de Fontarce appeared. "But you play well!" she exclaimed, sitting down as if exhausted; "better than I had hoped. You must practise, and keep it up; we know not what is before you, and you may require to maintain yourself, though I shall try to push your fortunes. Listen, my child: I have lately succeeded in having my position placed before our good emperor, partly through the influence of Monsieur Delille, and at last a pension has been assigned to the widow of the great emperor's faithful soldier and friend. It is not much, nevertheless I hope to make small economies, and leave the result to you, *ma fille*, should my life be spared; that, however, is very uncertain, and as you seem indisposed to return to the respectable Redman, and she is equally indisposed to have you, you had better, during the remaining six months of the two years I undertook, keep up all your accomplishments, that at the end of the time, should I not be able to find a *parti* for you, why you can no doubt be easily placed in some high English or Russian family—these nations pay best. It is very difficult to arrange a marriage for a girl without fortune or influence," concluded madame, pensively.

"My dear aunt," replied Madeline, colouring, for she had not lost her English notions respecting marriage—that being a tabooed subject at school, and in a convent there are few, if any, opportunities for private conversation—"I should be sorry to think you were reduced to hunt for a husband for me, if I am not sought."

"Pray do not parade such unpractical English nonsense to me," interrupted her aunt rather sternly. "A woman without fortune is rarely sought—at least in *marriage*—though no doubt there are men, themselves without fortune, and therefore not entitled to look for any in a wife, that yet have brains and will, and the material for success, and would appreciate such a wife—such a partner as you might, nay *would* make. Do not fancy marriage is a union of lovers; that is nonsense pure and simple. It may be a very disagreeable thing when persons of bad temper and exaggerated views are bound together; but it is a most use-

ful institution rightly understood and carried out, and we understand it much better here than they do in England."

"Still," said Madeline apologetically, "I should like to know and love my husband."

"Of course, and so you would love him—habit is so strong, and Frenchmen are almost always pleasing and polite to a sensible wife. Nay, few men value a sensible reliable woman, who will help his fortunes, and be a good mother to his children, so highly as a Frenchman. An Englishman does not care for a helpmate; he only wants a pretty doll to spend his money and hang jewels upon."

Madame de Fontarce hated the English cordially, and Madeline knew it; nevertheless she murmured, "Yet I think I should like an English husband."

"*Dieu des Dieux!*" cried her aunt, with startling energy and flashing eyes. "You have no idiotic *penchant* in that absurd country? no fair-haired domestic ideal? I give you credit for better things, Madeline."

"And so far you are right," replied the niece, with a calm smile, which reassured Madame de Fontarce. "I suppose every one has some ideal, and mine is so purely abstract that I have seen nothing which approaches it."

"That is well," returned the other, more tranquilly. "The real (when it appears) is pretty sure to send the ideal out of the field, meantime the field is harmlessly occupied; we all have our weaknesses and fancies in youth; but to let them interfere with the more solid views of life is worse than foolish, it is a sin against self-interest. However, Madeline, although I feel sure of your possessing good sense, I hope and expect you will promise to be guided by me in all future matters. Your happiness, your prosperity—and they are identical—are my first consideration. You were formed, *mon petit ange*, to occupy a far distant sphere from that to which fate seems inclined to consign you. You have intellect, and coolness, a brave yet patient spirit, plenty of head, and, unfortunately, plenty of heart—I should rather say weakness. What I dread for you is a *grande passion*, and in that conflict you would give all, and win nothing. You would give heart and soul, and truth and constancy, without one spark of that useful element denominated *passion*, while——"

"Nay, but my dear aunt," interrupted Madeline in her turn, "I am not quite so silly. At Clapham nearly all the girls were in love with the professors or the clergymen, one even fancied the drill sergeant; but I never had a shadow of a fancy for any of them. It all seemed a sort of disgraceful nonsense to me."

"Ah! that all corroborates my fears!" ejaculated Madame

de Fontarce; "yet what splendid capabilities for a wife. Ah! *mon Dieu!* grant me time. You might do me much credit yet, Madeline, if you will be but wise, and conquer that foolish longing for tenderness and sympathy, and a thousand other fine things, that exist only—mark me!—in the fancies of those pleasant pestilent fellows, the poets!—a longing you hide well, I grant, but not from *my* eyes. Now *no man* will ever give you what you want in this way. A man may gratify your vanity; he may give you rank and riches, and many pleasant accessories of life—and I grant men are often very entertaining companions—but tenderness, sympathy. Pooh!" and Madame suddenly opened her closed hand, every finger wide apart, with a gesture intensely expressive of the necessity of scattering such hopes to the wind.

"Ah!" sighed Madeline, "I do not doubt your wisdom; yet life without love! is it worth all the trouble we take about it? What does it give?"

"Success," returned the woman of the world. "A good place among your fellows—the consideration of society."

Madeline's lips parted to reply, but she prudently closed them again. Why should she speak an unknown tongue to her aunt? and why should she sadden her own spirit by listening to the epigrammatic sentences which only proved that life was but dust and ashes!—that the sole hope for which she cared to exist—the hope of loving and being loved—either by friend, relative, or lover—was one, the fulfilment of which was forbidden by the nature of things; so Madeline was wisely silent and wisely unconvinced. Protestant and Catholic each had assailed and shaken her faith in dogmas; but from her nobler faith in the eternal, all powerful influence of love, justice, and truth, none could wean her.

Madame de Fontarce paused for a reply, and none coming, was forced to believe Madeline convinced; so she resumed, "However, promise to be guided by me, and you will not regret it."

Madeline accepting this as a vague undertaking, gave the desired promise with sufficient readiness to satisfy Madame de Fontarce, who yet eyed her with a keen glance and knitted brow, for the young *pensionnaire* was somewhat of a puzzle to her, profound as was her knowledge of life and character under certain aspects. Her resources, however, presented her with no line sufficiently deep to sound such a nature as Madeline's.

Nathalie was now summoned, and Madeline placed under her charge to get gloves and bottines necessary to complete the toilette. These expeditions, arm in arm with the good femme-de-chambre, were some of Madeline's happiest hours. The anec-

dotes and shrewd remarks of her companion amused her, and the animation, the colour, the form floating round her was a constant feast to her naturally artistic eye; yet she chafed at the extreme thraldom in which she was held. However Madame de Fontarce might wreathe the chains, Madeline felt their pressure at every turn. However, between the naked angular chains of Abingdon Villas and the flower-wreathed fetters of the Rue St. Pierre, Madeline did not hesitate to choose. "Let me recall the *non père's* advice," and she thought of his eulogium on the virtue of patience. "That truest wisdom—that noblest strength," as he termed it. Yes! for the remaining six months she would be passive in the hands of her aunt; after that God would guide her.

Madeline's toilette for the theatre was a grand interest and excitement. It was a very fresh and gauzy white muslin, with a *corsage à l'enfant*—that is, simply gathered from the shoulders to the waist by a rich blue sash, with *bretelles* of the same marking the shoulders. A delicate frill of lace lay against the snowy throat, and the pale golden hair was drawn loosely back over a blue ribbon, which seemed, after peeping forth across the front of the head, to tie up the whole mass, with a couple of floating ends a little behind the left ear.

"Now, look here," said Madame de Fontarce at this stage of the operation, drawing her young kinswoman before the long cheval glass, which nearly occupied one end of the *cabinet de toilette*. "You are not a vain fool, Madeline, and it is well in your approaching battle with life to know with what weapons nature has furnished you. You think too much of your mind, *non enfant*, too little of your *personelle*. Both are useful, but remember, to succeed as a woman the more you keep the first out of sight the better, until you are as old as myself; the latter is of immense importance. Never forget that, or let others know you think about it. See your hair, it ought to be a fortune in itself. It is so peculiar, contrasted with your eyes. You are not handsome or pretty; but if, oh *ciel!*—if I could inspire you with ambition, which would develope tact, you might be what is a thousand times more powerful, *séduisante*. Then you have what so many women fail in, a natural air of distinction; and heavens! what an advantage have these eighteen months in Paris been to you! Child, you can never be grateful enough to me. Ah! if you will be but obedient, what may I not accomplish!"

Madame de Fontarce uttered these last sentences with energy, almost vehemence, and then suddenly sank back in her chair, pressing her hand to her heart.

"Dear aunt, kind friend," cried Madeline, tenderly approaching her, "you are ill, you are suffering."

"No, no!" said the countess, recovering herself, "you must

not treat me as an invalid; 'tis true I feel faint at times, but there is much life left in me still; get me a glass of water; and look, do you like the toilette I have designed for you?"

Thus exhorted, Madeline glanced blushingly at the glass. It reflected a charming figure, rather below middle height it is true, but round and *svelte*, with graceful sloping shoulders, a small head, so nobly poised, a pale, rather pensive face, yet clear in tint, with rich red lips, large dark eyes, and a profusion of pale, golden hair.

It is so delightful to feel good looking, that Madeline's spirits rose, and the sweetest smile dimpled round her mouth.

"I am thankful, my dear aunt," she said, "that you think there is any chance of my ever rewarding you for all you have done. But I fear your only chance of a return is in the approval of your conscience."

"Time will show," returned her protectress, in mysterious tones, "and now it is time for Madame Delille to be here, and you must not keep her waiting, so put on your bonnet." And an airy creation of tulle, and blonde, and daisies, was accordingly added as a crowning perfection, and placing a white muslin scarf edged with blue ribbon, round her niece's shoulders, Madame de Fontarce led the way into the salon, and was in the act of warning her against committing herself, as regarded any Protestant tendencies she might still cherish, when Nathalie announced Madame Delille, whereupon enter a tall, large-boned, slightly-rouged dame, with an elaborate toilette, and rather common aspect, at least she seemed common near the finished elegance of Madame de Fontarce, who received her with polite *empressement*. Madeline was presented with caressing playfulness, as an English mother might a pet child of six or seven, and told to thank madame for her goodness in affording her so much pleasure, which she did in a few simple, happily-chosen words, and with the gentle grace of manner Parisians delight and excel in. She, with her rich womanly nature, and broad, deep intelligence, smiled at the whole performance, and then thought she detected a glance as though of mutual understanding pass between her aunt and her chaperone.

After an affectionate embrace from the former, she followed Madame Delille, who was enormously polite, and rather *maniérée*, down the little steep stairs, and they were soon driving towards the theatre. The *trajet* was a source of enjoyment to Madeline, and she would have preferred gazing from the window to answering the formal questions of Madame Delille.

"Mademoiselle has not long left the convent?"

"Only yesterday, madame."

"Ah! it was, no doubt, sad to part with her beloved instruc-

tresses and young companions. Madame was very happy to be able to divert her thoughts by a visit to the theatre."

"Madame was very good, and it was a charming *divertissement*, nevertheless, Madeline was so glad to be with her *chère tante*, that she did not repine at leaving the convent, as she would otherwise have done."

"But you speak like a French girl; I should never imagine mademoiselle had been so long in England."

"I love your charming country, madame, and I suppose that has helped me to acquire your language. Madame's approbation is infinitely flattering."

The *loge*, which appeared to belong to Madame Delille, was large and well situated, and madame had many visitors during the evening, among them a rather flashy lady, most brilliantly dressed, whom she introduced to Madeline as "my married daughter," without mentioning any name. This personage also addressed her as though she were a mere schoolgirl, and seemed to examine her as she spoke.

"It is very droll," thought Madeline to herself, "but I cannot help feeling as though I were upon my trial."

The play charmed her. Never had she seen such acting. It was one of those simple, easy little pieces, droll in outline, yet full of touching points, so familiar to Parisian audiences, and the genius of Bouffé brought contending smiles and tears to lip and eye.

She was too genuinely absorbed to heed what passed in the interior of the box, and when at last, with good-humoured jest on her evident delight, Madame Delille hinted it was time to go, Madeline would fain have entreated to remain for the afterpiece.

"Ah!" she thought, "if Kit could but take a lesson from that polished villain who wrought so much mischief with so much ease; what a quantity of liquorice he might save, by not making his poor throat so sore with roaring."

Poor Kit! Even amid her marvellous yet uncertain prosperity with what true gratitude her heart turned to him. After all, his and Mrs. Fitzwarrenne's was the purest benevolence she had ever met.

These thoughts passed through her mind as the drop-scene fell on the second or principal play, for in Paris as well as in London they make the mistake of giving you too much for your money at the theatres. But Madeline was now too well trained to speak on any impulse, so she rose, obedient to the mandate of Madame Delille, when a strong, harsh voice at the back of the box said, "Mademoiselle would like to see the vaudeville, I am convinced. Could you not remain?"

"*Taisez vous*," replied Madame Delille, in tones expressive of the deepest disapprobation, "*c'est impossible.*"

There was no reply to this, and Madeline looked with no small surprise at the stranger who had divined her wishes. He was a short, stout, broad-shouldered man of about thirty, with a close-shaved face, through which the strong blue beard showed distinctly, though nothing was left of it but a pair of moustaches, waxed and twisted into spiky ends, and a chin tuft of the Henri Quatre type. He had small, restless, bright, black eyes, a large head, and heavy, cruel-looking jaw. Madame Delille, whose politely arranged countenance had clouded over very blackly, motioned to Madeline to precede her out of the box, the door of which was held open by this unknown translator of her wishes. As she passed she dropped the fan her aunt had lent her for the occasion. The gentleman immediately stooped and restored it, at the same time meeting Madeline's eyes with a look so unpleasantly eager, almost hungry, that she conceived an instantaneous, unreasoning horror of him she could neither account for nor repress.

"Who is that gentleman?" she asked of Madame Delille, as they drove towards the Rue.

"One of my sons," returned madame, but so drily that Madeline felt she had committed a solecism of Parisian "demoiselle" manners in making any inquiry about a gentleman, nature being supposed to be dormant in a French girl until she is a wife.

CHAPTER XI.

MADAME DE FONTARCE had retired when Madeline came back; but the next morning she was subjected to a strict examination. The episode of the mysterious appearance of Madame Delille's son seemed to cause as much annoyance to the countess as it had done to his mother; and Madeline laughed as she said, "Both you and madame appear angry. Yet it was natural he should come to his mother's box."

"What was he like?" asked her aunt, sharply.

"Well, he seemed cruel-looking to me. I did not like his appearance." And she shuddered slightly.

"Hum!" said Madame de Fontarce, clearing up. She changed the conversation, and soon Madeline almost forgot the incident.

The life in the Rue St. Pierre was not unpleasant, and though considerable authority and restraint were made use of, it was freedom after the convent. Moreover, though Madame de Fontarce adopted the conventual tone towards her niece in society—viz., as if she were a pet child of about ten years old—in private she always conversed with and treated her as an equal, at least in understanding.

Madame de Fontarce had now her evenings for receiving, and these *réunions*, though of the most tranquil description, were in some degree interesting to Madeline, who assisted at them as a listener and spectator, except when some fossilized dowager condescended to cross-examine her as to her preference for flowers, embroidery, or some such bagatelle. She was always treated by her aunt's guests as a Catholic, and as no direct opening ever offered to disclaim the imputation, she, in obedience to her aunt's repeated requests, left the matter alone.

Indeed, the tone in which religion was treated by her aunt's circle was not calculated to invest that subject with much importance; its members were far too well-bred, and gifted with too much good taste, to utter any unbecoming language on the subject, but it was invariably alluded to as a species of political institution useful for the masses, and therefore to be upheld by educated persons; but that they should believe in the efficacy of what they preached never seemed to be even supposed. A certain amount of sentiment, "poetry of soul," *culte de* this, or that, or the other, according to the temperament and disposition of the individual, relieved the tone from the aridity of utter scepticism; but it was a very floating religious capital, difficult to realize, and fertile in bad debts.

Sometimes *le bon* Père Duseautoir joined the circle, where he was treated with marked respect, and he always bestowed a good deal of attention upon Madeline. She enjoyed a conversation with him,

and revelled in the subtle flattery the notice of such a man conveyed.

She continued to study German, the friendly priest, who was a good linguist, sometimes hearing her read; and music became more necessary to her each day. Indeed, noticing her rare voice, Madame de Fontarce exerted herself in some of her accustomed mysterious ways, and suddenly Madeline found herself despatched one morning (always under the care of Nathalie) to the house of a famous Italian master of song, where she had the inexpressible delight of lessons. A year before she would have thanked her aunt with glistening eyes and flushed cheek, and prayed her not to tax her slender resources too severely. Now she felt most grateful for the trouble she knew Madame de Fontarce must have taken; but though no explanation was offered or sought, she felt, rather than knew, that whatever the lessons cost, they were not paid for in coin of the realm!

At first the great *maestro's* manner was rather rough and abrupt, as though to an inferior; afterwards he became interested in his gentle, intelligent pupil, and he seemed to take a personal interest in her progress, which was considerably beyond the average. One day he said: "More, perhaps, has been lost through indecision than any other cause, so make up your mind, elect for the stage, and *cospetto*, you shall be a *prima donna;* but you must decide."

"Ah!" cried Madeline, her eyes flashing with excitement, "Monsieur has divined my *carrière;* I have ever pined for the stage. Do, do speak to Madame de Fontarce; tell her I shall make money, quantities of money, and she will perhaps consent."

"Nay, mademoiselle," returned the great man, "I cannot undertake that task; you must manage it yourself."

It was nearly two months after Madeline had left the convent that this conversation took place; it revived the sort of anxiety respecting her future which the tranquillity of her life with Madame de Fontarce, and youth's belief in the permanency of the present, had lulled for a while.

The signor's words reawakened it. It was true she had unbounded faith in her aunt's worldly wisdom and *savoir faire*, and also, to a certain extent, her interest in her (Madeline's) success. Nevertheless, it is startling to throw the disposition of one's life, even for six months, into the hands of another. Besides, if she was to go on the stage, why lose time? Madame de Fontarce might possibly prefer some other career, but she would not turn from it with unreasoning horror and condemnation, like the "respectable Redman." No, to do this veteran Parisianised Hibernian justice, no line of life which promised money, amusement, and success of any kind, was altogether despicable in her eyes. The god of her idolatry was a certain small and many-faced deity, known famili-

arly as "*Bon marché*," and on this shrine she had sacrificed—no! that word does not apply to any of Madame de Fontarce's doings; —she had *offered* the consistent worship of a life! A bargain, the full worth of the cost, and more than the worth, was what she piqued herself on obtaining, and to do her justice, generally did obtain.

Her enthusiasm, well managed generally, ebbed and flowed with the success of the cause she adopted, not that she ever vulgarly renounced the sinking side—no, she mourned and shook her head over it tenderly. They said that when Napoleon returned from Elba, she was in a dreadful strait, and as usual found her way out of it; on this occasion, as on most others, Monsieur le Colonel de Fontarce was wisely guided by her suggestions, and went to his bed, being troubled with brain fever, the truth of which was attested by his wife's triumphantly shaving his head, and indeed he took part in the second entrance of the Bourbons, with a melancholy face and a head like a scrubbing brush. The barber's fee on that occasion was *bon marché;* so was the quiet adherence displayed by the widowed countess to the Buonaparte clique after Louis Philippe had had his *congé;* so were her friendly relations with the religious party; so was her adoption of Madeline—a bargain in which she got gratitude, affection, interest, reputation, and the possibility of extended influence through the means of her "capable" niece, in exchange for a little trouble, and the amusement of some scheming, a real diversion to this supreme *intriguante*, but no outlay of cash. Still, though seeing through her aunt, Madeline was really and warmly attached to Madame de Fontarce, who eminently understood the art of making things pleasant, and had a good temper and marvellously fine digestion for her age; moreover, she had never, at any time, been inclined to unnecessary cruelty, though she would unhesitatingly have sacrificed any or every one to forward a favourite scheme, *if* it was necessary, and she had always treated Madeline kindly and considerately. This recognition of madame's real character, in spite of her fair seeming, was no moral advantage to Madeline, especially as her aunt managed to keep up her kindly feelings, while she lost that half-poetic respect which the imaginative love so much to give to age; and the result of our young orphan's sojourn under the patronage of Madame de Fontarce was a sort of vague notion that life was, to quote one of Mr. Dickens's heroes—"a muddle," and the best thing she could do was to snatch what enjoyment she could from its meshes.

Yet, to a heart instinctively noble as hers, this very idea destroyed the zest for enjoyment. The best proof of immortality lay within herself and the impossibility of selfish enjoyment. The annihilation of to-day by the forced recklessness of to-morrow—No! to

toil for and tend some beloved or helpless one—to look to joys of the heart beyond all that this world could bestow, such was the life—such the tone of belief—that would have lent present pleasures a rapture and a glow; no mere irresponsible right to enjoy because the future had neither hope or fear could have even given.

Whatever her deeper hopes or belief at this critical period of her mental history, she determined to lay the suggestions of her great singing master before the arbitress of her fate. In coming to this decision she was surprised to find how much less of fear and hesitation she experienced than on former occasions. 'Tis true, that to open any subject with Madame de Fontarce had never been the formidable business which similar undertakings were with the "respectable Redman." Madame de Fontarce was always ready to listen at least with courtesy. Still the first intense and romantic respect and affection with which her aunt inspired her, rendered her reluctant to offer that well-bred relative anything save the readiest obedience. Once, however, that first little minute point of the wedge circumstance had inserted itself in the barriers by which fancy shut out reason's light, the illuminating process had proceeded rapidly, and with a diminution of that intense regard which had weighed her down somewhat, yet not unpleasantly.

The day after the conversation glanced at above, Madeline had quite made up her mind to the discussion, and for this purpose had hastened her toilette, intending to have a little more time before her aunt left her room, for Madame de Fontarce now remained longer than formerly in her bed, after the morning's cup of *café au lait*.

Madeline was proceeding to ask for admission as usual, when Nathalie stopped her.

"Not just now, *ma bonne demoiselle*," she said, "Madame la Comtesse is engaged with Madame Delille, and must not be disturbed. I will tell you when you can enter."

"My aunt engaged with Madame Delille!" repeated Madeline, much surprised, "and so early!"

"'Tis even so," said Nathalie, with an air of much superior information, and checked herself from saying more, a fact that struck Madeline, and suggested that more than once she had found Madame Delille closeted with Madame de Fontarce, though never so early as on this occasion, and that when she had so found them, they had evidently changed the tone and conversation; and though Madame Delille had always been polite to her, she had been less *empressée* than on their first meeting, and never repeated her invitation to accompany her to the theatre. Madeline passed it all rapidly through the alembic of her brain, but made nothing of the analysis, so she retreated to her slip of a chamber over the

archway, where, by the way, she now felt quite at home, and which she had very much to herself, Nathalie only entering it at night.

Here Nathalie found her some time after, and informed her that Madame la Comtesse was now at liberty to receive, so Madeline made her way once more to the side of the ornamented bed, where her aunt lay, her eyes very bright, yet looking exhausted.

"*Ma belle enfant*," she said caressingly, "I have been wishing for you. I have had one of those palpitations, which visit me sometimes. It is nothing, however," she added, seeing her niece's expressive face cloud over with kindly sympathy. "It is but a reminder that I am no longer young, that the sooner I can see my little niece settled, the better—" she stopped abruptly, as though respiration was difficult.

"Do not trouble yourself for me, dear aunt," returned Madeline, earnestly, "except to give me that advice you are capable of bestowing. I was indeed anxious to tell you of some remarks which Signor G—— made yesterday, and which tended to confirm me in an old fancy for my future career," and she repeated them.

Madame de Fontarce frowned, smiled, and then turned a little uneasily on her pillow.

"I am not so rampantly averse to an actress's life as many of my birth and position would be," she said at length. "I confess I would select it for you before the most respectable and infinitely more uncomfortable position of a governess. If nothing better offered, I should not too rigidly oppose your fancy. You might achieve success, respectable success, in England; that land of social contradictions, where they doubt the propriety of the drama, but admit actresses to their intimate life! And I imagine, that with training, you would make a tolerable actress; and you have some elements which would be an enormous help to you. But let us not think of this now. I am at length able to lay before you an eligible *parti*, which, though at present not a great match, promises, I think, well,—the second son of Madame Delille, a Captain de Genie. He has at present little beyond his pay, 'tis true, but I have promised that you shall have a little *cadeau du marriage*, in which, no doubt, the respectable Redman will assist. And I am not now without my influence near a certain illustrious individual, who will be pleased that one of his officers chooses to ally himself with the favourite niece of so firm a Buonapartist as myself. I mention this that you may feel reassured—and not that you are taken into any family without a reciprocity of advantages. I confess the affair presented many difficulties; but I had set my heart on your marriage. The position an actress may make for herself in England is, I am told, astonishing; nevertheless, as a married woman, the wife of a respectable man, with anything like

capability, you start where she leaves off; and the opening for a clever, cool-headed woman, as the wife of François Delille is excellent." Madame de Fontarce paused again, wanting breath, having spoken with some excitement.

"My aunt," said Madeline, in low, earnest tones, "this—this Monsieur Delille, is he—is he the gentleman who came to his mother's box the night she took me to the Variétés?"

"The same," replied Madame de Fontarce.

"*Dieu des Dieux!*" cried Madeline, with irrepressible horror. "Death, rather than such a marriage!"

"Mademoiselle is already rehearsing," said Madame de Fontarce, with icy irony. "My dear Madeline," she returned, in a more genial tone, "do not wrong yourself in my opinion by indulging in childish outbursts. I have always given you credit for a larger share of reason than is common at your age. Is it worthy of you to exclaim in such a fashion on a subject of which you know nothing? Listen; I have made three distinct efforts to arrange your marriage, and this is the last and only successful one. In the first instance a sum of money was insisted on which I had no means of supplying; in the second, a difficulty of the same nature arose; and although I made MadameDelille's acquaintance, and invited her to my little *réunions*, for no other purpose than to secure her second son for you, I cannot exhaust myself, in my weak state, by recounting the innumerable difficulties I have had to surmount; the principal point I have to mention is, that the *futur* himself has taken an extraordinary interest in the affair since your accidental meeting at the theatre, a *rencontre* which I believe *was* purely accidental, for though much annoyed at the time by such a breach of *les convenances*, I quite acquit Madame Delille of any combination with her son, especially as your interview was likely to militate against her views. Another young lady was since proposed for Monsieur le Capitaine, with, I am told, a small fortune—a very small one, I grant, but still more than yours, which is nothing. However, the *futur* declined—nay, though it would not of course go for much had any serious embarrassment arisen, yet the young man has evinced a decided preference for you, and that surely ought to mollify some of your absurd insular prejudices, which I am disappointed to think you have not discarded;" and Madame de Fontarce paused after this long speech, partly for breath, partly for an answer. But Madeline merely bent her head in token of being ready to listen further. In truth, she had been struggling for self-control while her aunt spoke. She felt suddenly placed in desperate circumstances. Here were the horns of a dilemma. To marry this blue-bearded, hungry-looking Delille, was impossible!—to offend her aunt, fatal both to her prospects, and, what she thought of much more, her self-imposed

sense of gratitude and duty. She therefore bent her head to gain time, before she committed herself to any reply—looking calm, but pale, while her heart beat painfully, and she silently ejaculated an earnest "God direct me!"

Madame de Fontarce paused a moment, and resumed—

"I am glad to see you are more ready to hear than to speak; it is the proper attitude of youth. Now, I acknowledge the inconvenience of having a husband absolutely in love with you. It is, of course, a restraint, and delays that settling down to an everyday condition which is so desirable; but, of course, it would not last long, and it might throw a good deal of power into your hands, though that is by no means certain. The capitaine is most anxious, if possible, ultimately to obtain a position near the emperor's person, to whose fortunes he is wisely determined to attach himself; and in the first steps towards this end, the mouse may help the lion. I have one or two old friends near his Majesty; and my name, my fidelity, is not unknown. Imagine, my love, what a prospect opens before you!—a residence in this charming centre of civilization—a possible position at Court—a further possibility of influence there! your children possibly peers of the new empire, which, should *his* life be spared, our present great ruler will make greater than it has ever been! Think, Madeline Digby, think," she concluded, with startling energy, raising herself on her pillows, her withered cheek flushing at the idea of such a triumph of *bon marché*, "think of such a career for the penniless orphan of a ruined Irish cadet, the browbeaten dependent of that rich Redman woman!" And having sent home this last stroke with stinging emphasis, Madame de Fontarce sank back on her pillow.

"Dear aunt," began Madeline, hesitating and speaking low, "kindest friend, I can never thank you enough for the care you take of my fortunes; the picture you draw is brilliant. How shall I disappoint you when I say it possesses no charm for me."

Madame de Fontarce raised hands and eyes in silent protest to *her* deity against such mental perversion. "Nevertheless, I am so anxious to bend myself to your views, so desirous to reward, in some way, your exertions on my behalf, that I will not yield to my first impulse. Grant me a few days to reflect—to weigh what you have said——"

"Ah! *ciel!*" cried her aunt, impatiently, "I have arranged that Madame Delille shall bring her son here on Thursday, the day after to-morrow, to make the formal demand modern etiquette now sanctions, if you are willing to ratify the engagement that has been made for you, and a refusal would be an unheard-of affront. No! you must decide now—or rather," continued the old lady, vehemently, "you have nothing to decide. Do you mean to

retract the solemn promise you gave me scarce six weeks ago, that you would commit yourself to my guidance? Do you intend to make me regret that I ever interested myself in you, or—" softening her voice artistically, "allowed this wearied heart to repose in the belief of your affection?"

Madeline was touched, and melted into tears, but not quite so carried away as to forget that her whole future happiness or misery depended on herself and the next few days; she was shocked, too, to see the effect her opposition produced upon her aged relative.

"My dear aunt," she said, "why did you not tell me what you were doing, and give me an opportunity of declaring my own sentiments? Now I feel I have the power to maintain myself, must I throw away the chance of married happiness, which, slight though it may be, I hold in common with others, for a chance equally slight of a position at the Court of France—a nod, two or three times a year, from his Majesty."

"Ah! little foolish one," whispered Madame de Fontarce, in a deep whisper, pressing her hand feverishly, "you know not, you dream not, the pleasures that await a married woman, possessed of the charms, the capabilities, that lie dormant in you! But leave me; go, reflect; and remember, I have set all my hopes on this marriage."

"Nay, dear aunt! but hear me;" began Madeline.

"No, not another word," said her aunt, peremptorily; "I am quite exhausted, send Nathalie to me."

Poor Madeline retired to her own chamber overwhelmed, yet not subdued; she owed a duty to herself as well as obedience to her aunt; she dared not, she must not, enter into this horrible marriage. How little she anticipated to what her unguarded promise to submit to her aunt's guidance would commit her, and how to evade it! To this question she applied the whole force of her brain; she sat and pondered, gazing on each inanimate object in the cheerless chamber till it became painfully stamped upon her mind,—the bare brown boards, the two small boat-like beds, the rude accessories of the toilette, especially the diminutive basins which had so distressed her at first. Oh! if she had one friend to apply to, one creature to whom she could turn to influence her aunt—but no! She thought of the good *père*. Even he! Would he interest himself in such a matter? No, not unless she desired to take the veil, and Monsieur le Capitaine was almost preferable to such a living death as that. It was an awful strait, but chiefly she dreaded contradicting or agitating her aunt, whose health she saw terribly altered; yet she must devise some means of escape. Her subtle brain turned and turned for awhile in vain; no opening seemed to offer, save what involved a moral earthquake of

some description. At last a desperate resolve suggested itself, was rejected, then returned again, was conned over, and at last decided upon. She would appeal to Monsieur Delille himself; she would confide in his honour; she would persuade him to make a difficulty, so as at any rate to gain time, and then time worked wonders. As it was, she knew enough of social life in France to be aware how soon the marriage took place after the formal acceptance, and if she could do nothing to delay it her fate would be fixed. Had she not felt so bound to her aunt by gratitude and kindly feeling she would have fled, penniless as ever, for Madame de Fontarce never left a sous at her disposal. In the mean time she would make a last appeal to her aunt, and display all the reluctance and dislike she felt at such a marriage; then, if successful in procuring its postponement or breaking it off, nothing, nothing should keep her from starting an independent career somehow or other. She was now nearly nineteen, and surely old enough to stand alone.

However, the future must take care of itself, the pressing difficulty of the present was to be met. Now, as to her scheme of throwing herself on the chivalry of Monsieur Delille. How was she to manage it? She would never see him alone until she was his wife; and besides the minor difficulty of procuring paper and ink to write, how could she get a letter conveyed? Nathalie, "*bonne enfant*" as she was, sympathetic and motherly, would as soon have dreamed of deceiving the Virgin Mary as executing any little manœuvre undiscovered by Madame de Fontarce, in whose ubiquity she firmly believed, and besides, on this occasion, was thoroughly her mistress's partisan. Of his (Capitaine Delille's) address she was profoundly ignorant, and dared not hazard an inquiry respecting it. No, it was a desperate deed, and must be daringly executed. She would write a touching appeal, and during the momentous interview slip it unperceived into his hand, with a whispered prayer that he would grant her request. The present was a precious moment of liberty, so she at once sought for paper, and procured a pencil, all the writing materials she could find, and then poured forth the most earnest address her natural eloquence (of no mean order) could suggest, invoking all the better and higher feelings of which a man could be capable; then she folded it up carefully and placed it in her bosom, determined it should never leave her until she placed it in Monsieur Delille's hand, and when she had finished she felt calmer.

Presently Nathalie came to tell her that madame was going out *en voiture*, and sent her love, and Madeline might walk with Nathalie if so inclined. But Madeline was not. "No, my good Nathalie," she said, "I feel sad, sick at heart; everything is against me."

"*Mais, fi donc!*" cried Nathalie, plunging her hands into her pockets, and filling up the doorway with her jovial, handsome figure. "Mademoiselle ought to be ashamed to speak so, when all the world is her friend, and strives to make her happy. Come, then, put on your bonnet, and let us stroll down the boulevard, if only to see what are the newest modes, that the mind of mademoiselle may be prepared to choose her *trousseau*."

And Madeline, feeling she could do herself no good by staying at home, and had little chance of securing Nathalie's co-operation, consented.

CHAPTER XII.

THURSDAY came with awful rapidity. Madeline had not failed to essay an appeal to her aunt's feelings on the subject of the projected marriage, and had been met by a counter appeal. Madame de Fontarce's little Madeline, her pet child, would not for a whim so defeat the favourite plan of her loving aunt, of her adopted mother, now that age and infirmity had left her so few pleasures! And here the astute countess had her niece at her mercy. Madeline gave up the contest, and put her trust in Providence.

The fatal Thursday was a gloomy sultry day, and Madeline rose early because she could not sleep; she was deadly pale, and dark shadows beneath her eyes gave her a haggard look.

Nathalie was in despair. "But mademoiselle! how perverse to look thus! when the most ravishing *toilette de fiancée* had been prepared, and Madame la Comtesse had set her heart on seeing mademoiselle look like a beautiful princess. Hold, a cup of *café noir* would revive her, and then she should go into madame's room, madame had signified that she would receive her in a little quarter of an hour.

So Nathalie hurried away to prepare the desired cup of coffee. Madeline took it thankfully, it seemed to revive her, and then Nathalie went to her mistress; she returned almost immediately however, pale and agitated, her eyes staring with terror.

"Oh! mademoiselle, come!" she said. "My dear mistress is no more! see! come!"

Madeline, now equally alarmed, ran to her aunt's room, and there beheld Madame de Fontarce, in her *peigneur*, seated in her easy chair, her head fallen back, breathing heavily, and unable to speak. Nathalie flew to the *concierge*, and entreated him to fetch the nearest doctor, while Madeline with trembling fingers sought to feel the pulse—but in vain, she was icy cold, and the eyes were closed. Nathalie seemed quite bewildered with grief and fright.

and Madeline scarce dared (in her ignorance) to suggest anything.

"Had we not better try and lay her on the bed," she whispered at length; they spoke with bated breath, awed by the approach of the dread presence.

"God knows!" returned Nathalie, drying her eyes with her apron, but yielding naturally to the suggestion of a superior. With some difficulty, and the assistance of the wife of the *concierge*, who came to see what was the matter, they contrived to lay the helpless form on the bed, Madeline fanning her constantly, as she hoped it was but a swoon. After what appeared a long time to the watchers, though in truth with wonderful celerity, the doctor came, and in time, but not soon, the restoratives seemed to have the desired effect.

Madame de Fontarce slowly opened her eyes, the first object they fell upon was Madeline, and she muttered feebly, "How is it you are not dressed?" and relapsed into a sort of insensibility.

"Do not contradict her," whispered the doctor, "and do not leave her alone on any account; I shall return in a couple of hours."

Madeline therefore took her place beside the pillow, listening awe-struck to the low laboured breathing, until Nathalie, having made some necessary arrangements, was ready to relieve her.

She stole away for a moment and despatched a little billet to Père Duscautoir, informing him of her aunt's seizure and begging he would come to her as soon as possible, as she felt terribly desolate and bewildered; this the *concierge* readily undertook to convey, the excitement of the moment and a vision of numerous *pour boires* rendering him unusually alert and obliging. Then Madeline crept back and ascertained that her aunt had lain in the same state since she left the room. She stood a few moments gazing at the ashen cheek, the changed features. Could that indeed be the same face that two days ago with such eagerness, such fire of expression, had with keen, well-chosen words, insisted on Madeline's co-operation in a scheme of worldly advantage? What was the world to her now?—would it ever be aught to her again? As she gazed awe-struck at the wreck before her, madame partially opened her eyes, and said in a thick indistinct murmuring voice, "Ah! no; I will not remain. I will go to Paris!—the place for enterprise. There is nothing left me now; no, I cannot remain!" and then the voice sank into inarticulate whispers.

"Ah!" murmured Nathalie, "poor lady! she thinks she is at Bordeaux. *Mais, mon Dieu!* have you sent for the *bon père*, mademoiselle?"

"Yes," returned Madeline, in the same suppressed tone, "if he was at home he will be here soon."

"The good God will bless you," returned Nathalie, much relieved. For a moment she had doubted the Protestant tendencies of the young English stranger.

Then the bell rang, and Nathalie disappeared, and was some time absent.

"Is it not M. Duseautoir?" asked Madeline anxiously.

Nathalie shook her head, but did not say who had rung.

The priest, however, did not long delay, and his presence was an enormous relief to Madeline. He at once sent in a *sœur de charité*, who took command of the little household, and seemed to be doctor and nurse in one. The doctor called once every day, but could do little or nothing. Poor Madeline crept about bewildered, very quiet, patient, and obedient, hanging about the sick room in hopes of some recognition from the poor insensible form which lay there on the ornamented bed, that now seemed so cruel a mockery of the solemn presence hovering over it.

But once, and once only, the heavy eyelids opened, and the glazing eye met Madeline's. A sort of change, it could not be called a smile, passed over her face; but Madeline felt she was recognised, and stooping tenderly, kissed the poor helpless hand that lay outside the clothes. Madame de Fontarce closed her eyes, and never opened them again, though she continued to breathe for nearly twenty-four hours longer, and then passed away, they scarce knew when.

What an icy sense of desolation pressed upon Madeline's heart, as the knowledge that her aunt, her only friend, was gone, reached her mind. Silently she knelt and shared the rapid but devout prayers poured forth by the *sœur de charité*.

M. Duseautoir had administered extreme unction several hours before. Now all was quite over, and while Nathalie bemoaned her loss with loud and violent grief, the attendant sister led Madeline to her little chamber, and bid her pray and sleep. Exhausted by her long watch and varied emotion, she did sleep long and deeply.

When she awoke, the kindly Nathalie soon came, pressing her to eat, and informing her that M. Duseautoir was in the chamber of death.

The next few days went by like a dream to Madeline. She never knew of what disorder her aunt died. The friendly priest said it was something connected with the brain, not an unusual cause of death with old people. Meantime she was penniless, and without any idea where to turn, for the apartment was constantly filled with officials, who made lists and opened boxes and *secrétaires*, and poor Madeline was evidently an utter nobody.

And she could not bring herself to write to Mrs. Redman. Not yet. She must wait a few days, just to see what would occur.

Then the funeral took place, much sooner than it would have done in England, and at an earlier hour; and when it was over, M. Duseautoir took Madeline into the deserted *salon*, and, seating her by him on the sofa, said: "My poor child, you must leave these rooms. They are the proprietor's, but the kind ladies of the Annonciades are willing to receive you. I will take you there this evening. First, I must inform you that the late excellent lady, your aunt, with the true devotion which ever distinguished her life, has left her little fortune—not much, a few thousand francs—with the exception of a small legacy to Nathalie, to be expended in masses for the repose of her soul, and her diamond brooch and earrings to the convent, which will receive you. Not knowing your circumstances, dear daughter, I have striven for you, and you shall have your good aunt's clothes, her lace—very little, but of some value—and a few trinkets she usually wore. Nathalie has put them all ready for you. And now, think well. If you are, as I suspect, poor, and destined to win your own bread, elect to enter the fold of the only true church, and I will place you well amid the best families of France."

"*Mon père*," said Madeline softly but steadily, "I dare not deceive you; I shall ever remember the Annonciades and yourself with love and respect, but I cannot join your church! I do not think I ever shall, not now certainly." The good father bent his brows and sighed as though disappointed. "Well, dear child," he said, "you yet want shelter, and shall have it. I must leave you now, but will return for you in the space of an hour, when I shall remove you to the tender care of the good abbess, until you can communicate with your friends in England."

It seemed incredible to Madeline that all was so soon over, that an event so important to her should be attended by so little change in the world which surrounded her. She felt, too, a little sore that her aunt, who professed so much love and tenderness for her, should have left the trifle at her disposal to purchase the esteem and approbation of that world for which she could exist no longer! and to buy that which the *esprit fort* of the defunct countess almost openly despised in life. Nathalie was remembered, a small sum equal to a couple of years' wages being bequeathed to her, but no mention of Madeline. The trinkets, clothes, and lace of Madame de Fontarce, however, were great possessions, for though the wardrobe was not by any means extensive it was well-chosen and in good order. Moreover a young person can wear delicate greys and black, which were the prevailing colours, so as far as the gain went Madeline was satisfied; her heart would have been more content had she received those goods as a direct bequest.

Now all was over. Nathalie with many tears parted from Madeline—she intended returning to her native Bordeaux, there her

little money would go further, and she thought of joining a brother in a wine shop—and again Madeline strolled and meditated in the still quiet convent garden, its repose rendered deeper by the dim echo of the distant roar of life. "Madame la Supérieure" was very kind and offered to receive her as a *postulante*. But no!—sad as it was, the hour of freedom had come, and Madeline determined never again to be dependent while health was spared her.

Of course Mrs. Redman's reply to her letter announcing the death of Madame la Fontarce, and the disposition of her small property, was as sour a production as can well be imagined.

"So much for fine names and fine promises, which had utterly deluded Madeline, but which she, Mrs. Redman, had always seen through. Now, she supposed she would have Madeline back on her hands, after paying for her all these years, for Madame de Fontarce was not left to do all unassisted, as *she* had been. Mrs. Redman recommended her to return to London, and get a situation as governess as soon as possible, for which purpose Mrs. Redman supposed there was enough of the last quarter's allowance left to pay her expenses back. Of course she would come to Abingdon Villas, there was no other place for her to go to," &c.

"Ah," thought Madeline as she perused this, "if worldliness must exist, give it to me rather in the French than English fashion;" as she pondered over this epistle, a sister came to tell her that Madame Delille was in the parlour waiting to see her. "Madame Delille," repeated Madeline, colouring, and then turning paler if possible than before, "Is she alone?"

"Ah! I cannot say; *la bonne mère* sent me to you."

So Madeline thought for a moment that there was no one to coerce or influence her now, and recovering herself, went quietly into the parlour. Madame Delille was there, with the sub-abbess, who rose as Madeline entered, and left the room. It was a warm day, May had melted into June, and the large door-like, curtainless windows were open to the ground; some flowers lent their perfume and beauty to the cold room, with its white-painted panels, dark floor, and stiff, meagre furniture. Madame Delille, who wore slight complimentary black, was seated on what the girls used to call the guest's sofa, being the only article deserving that luxurious appellation in the house. She rose to meet Madeline, embraced her on both cheeks, and placed her beside her with most studied and respectful politeness; then she made a short oration, in which the terrible bereavement of Mademoiselle de Digby, the virtues and manifold excellencies of the late your aunt, the grief and sympathy of Madame Delille herself, and her burning desire to assist Madeline in any possible or impossible manner, were neatly interwoven.

"Can she want to renew the marriage negociation?" thought Madeline, schooling herself to be collected, and bearing in mind that nothing save a slight unpleasantness could arise from such a proposition. She therefore pressed Madame Delille's hand in return for its pressure, and made a suitable little speech in reply (Madeline had profited largely by her short training in the *salon* of Madame de Fontarce), echoing, after the manner of such formalities, the sentiments of the first speaker.

Then Madame Delille paused and cleared her throat, and recommenced. She said it was with a heart torn by contending emotions she had dismissed her beloved son to his regiment—principle and duty must be considered before inclination and feeling; nevertheless, that dear François had been in despair, ready to do any deed of rashness, when he found the marriage could not be fulfilled.

"Madame Delille's dear mademoiselle, though not absolutely French, was almost French in modesty, propriety, and sense, thanks to the admirable training of madame, her defunct aunt; she would therefore understand that her lamented decease must render the marriage, to which they had all looked forward with such gratification, quite out of the question. The most modest *ménage* required money or interest to support it; and now (with an expressive shrug) even justice to mademoiselle forbids the contemplation of such a union."

Madame listened. smiling inwardly to hear Madame Delille so clearly convincing herself of the equity of her own proceedings; yet there was a degree of cynicism in her amusement which was melancholy at her age.

"Madame has perfect reason," she said, when there was space for a reply. "I scarce expected or thought there was any necessity for an explanation. But it is as well, as it has procured me the pleasure of seeing madame. Your admirable system, too, prevents any suffering of the heart, by forbidding acquaintance while there is a chance of separation. Monsieur your son and myself can have therefore no poignant regrets, and can truthfully wish each other *bon voyage* and success in life."

"Nevertheless," exclaimed Madame Delille, charmed with this happy termination of an awkward interview: "I do deeply regret the loss of such a daughter-in-law; and I trust, if there is any service in my power to render you, you will not hesitate to tell me."

"A thousand thanks," returned Madeline, in the same calm, almost superior, tone she had maintained throughout. "There is nothing. In another week I shall return to my relations in England, leaving Paris certainly with tender regret."

"Then," said Madame Delille, rising, "you must be much oc-

cupied, and I will detain you no longer. Adieu, mademoiselle, and accept the assurance of my most profound esteem and regard."

Again Madame Delille embraced Madeline, and swept out of the room. There was a little courteous struggle to prevent Madeline from escorting her to the door, beyond which pupils must not pass; then Madame Delille glided away, and Madeline saw her no more.

The next day Madeline wrote a long letter to Mrs. Moorcroft, detailing her position, her wishes, and her capabilities as a teacher. She requested her, for the sake of their old friendship, to insert an advertisement in the *Times*, setting forth what she could do, that she had never been out before, and whatever else Mrs. Moorcroft thought it wise to insert; also what salary she ought to ask; and, finally, to permit an address to her house. She felt her spirits rise when she had accomplished this task. Here was a step towards independence.

Then she wrote to Mrs. Redman, and assured her she would no longer cost her anything, for she had determined to seek an engagement at once; and for her present wants she had enough, which was true, for after some reflection, she had begged the superioress to accept a costly piece of *point d'Alençon* for the ornamentation of the figure of that lady's patron saint, and thus won her help and favour in disposing of a sufficient portion of the delicate fabric she had inherited to supply her with the funds requisite to convey her to England. She would only wait Mrs. Moorcroft's reply to her letter, and then decide what day she would commit herself once more to the winds and waves of life.

The expected letter was rather long in coming, but when it did, it contained a most kind and pressing invitation to Madeline to come and stay for a few weeks with her friend's mother, and decide there what to do.

This was an unexpected pleasure. Madeline hesitated, and then thought that she might accept for a short time; and if Mrs. Moorcroft would only allow her to stay as a boarder, what a delightful home-like protection it would be until she could find employment; and Jessie, too, would soon be at home. Yes, she would go there in the first instance, and then, by the aid of their friendly advice, decide on her future proceedings. So she wrote a most grateful acceptance, and then sought the lady superior, to announce her approaching departure.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was a sultry July evening when Madeline, much wearied by her rapid journey, her past excitement, and the heat, stopped at the entrance of Ashley Villas, just four years after her first visit there. It looked as fresh as ever, and cool too, for the sun was off it, but silent and quiet beyond description, after the noise and animation of Paris. The place was improved too. The opposite row of houses was finished, and the road passable. To Madeline's surprise the door was opened by Mr. Samuel Moorcroft, who, contrary to his usual calm fashion, rushed down the steps, to hand her out of the cab, hatless; he looked very hot too, but that was natural. Mrs. Moorcroft appeared in the doorway, smiling and serene.

Madeline felt more of joy in that moment than she had known since she had mourned over her father.

"How kind of you to take this trouble," she said; giving her hand to Sam, as she descended. "How delightful to be among you once more." Then followed, of course, a hearty hug from Mrs. Moorcroft, and the necessary plunge into the little living-room on the basement.

It was curious to Madeline to go down there now. It seemed a wonderful dingy, mean place, with all its home-like neatness, after the lofty, solemn chambers of the convent, and the Parisian effect of her aunt's *salon;* yet she was right thankful to be there, and turned a radiant smile on her kind hostess, who was eager in hospitalities.

"What would Madeline take? she must be exhausted."

"Oh, anything—first a glass of water."

"Dear, dear, that is poor refreshment. I have a nice chop in the house, and a cup of tea."

"A chop, and an English cup of tea! Ah, how delicious!" returned Madeline, with the wondrous softness and repressed animation which gave such a charm to her manner. Mrs. Moorcroft bustled out of the room for a minute, and then returned to exclaim at the new shape of Madeline's bonnet and mantle, and the absence of crape.

"They do not understand crape in Paris, you know," said Madeline. "Mourning there is merely a black dress, bonnet, and gloves; and I shall adopt it, for crape is so expensive."

"And you have grown, my dear, not exactly tall, but so womanly and changed—your very voice. Don't you think so, Sam?" —to her son, who had been sitting a silent spectator, apparently tongue-tied.

"Yes," said Sam, dolefully.

"I am changed in many ways," returned Madeline, with a sigh, "yet not in heart."

Mrs. Moorcroft could not define in words what it was she recognised as new in her young friend, but she felt dimly inclined to apologise for the parlour in the basement and the servant's bare arms when she brought in the tea. She felt that so elegant a looking creature as Madeline was out of place there; then she turned vaguely and angrily against that deceitful Frenchwoman. What right had she to take her niece and unfit her for common things, and then make no provision for her, but throw her back, penniless, on the world? Mr. Sam felt a similar oppression. He sighed and gazed at Madeline while she ate the chop, too absorbed even to cut her some bread and butter, till reproached by his mother.

"You will find us dull, slow people after your life in Paris, Miss Digby," he said at last, ruefully.

"Far from it. You little know the life of a demoiselle in Paris. It is something more monotonous than any English person can imagine; yet to those who are free what a charming place Paris must be!"

"I suppose so. I saw very little of it when I went to fetch Jessie, and she was miserable at school, and hated everything French."

"Well, I should have been like her, burning to return, had I had a dear mother like you," taking Mrs. Moorcroft's hand, and keeping it with tender grace, "waiting for me. Nevertheless, I must ask you to be so far a mother to me as to help me with good advice, for I must set about finding some engagement at once. You know I have nothing in the world but my aunt's old clothes!" and she showed all her pearly teeth with such a bright smile. "My poor dear aunt! she was so good to me, and I loved her too. It is grievous to think that her last feelings were those of annoyance."

"How so, my dear?" asked Mrs. Moorcroft.

"Oh! I will tell you all about it by-and-by."

"Well, I must say," said Mrs. Moorcroft, shaking her head, "I think she acted unfairly by you. Why did she not leave you independent?"

"Because she could not!—she had nothing to leave!"

"Then why did she make a fine lady of you, and unfit you for earning your own living?"

"My dear Mrs. Moorcroft," said Madeline, opening her great eyes, "she did not. I am much more fit to earn it now than before I went to her; and as to being a fine lady, I cannot think what you mean. That is a *rôle* I should never dream of attempting."

"Well, well, we must do the best we can," said Mrs. Moorcroft, ringing to have the tea-things cleared away.

"Yes, we must! and to-morrow I will go and see Mrs. Redman, I ought to report myself to her. She must never think I neglect the politeness due to her."

Then there was a little exchange of intelligence. Mrs. Moorcroft told Madeline with pride that Willie had been promoted, and was now stationed at Birmingham; that Samuel had gone as managing-clerk into a large wholesale business, set up by his former employer's brother, and had hopes of being made junior partner; and both were *such* good boys—so ready to help their mother, that in another six months she expected to be able to dispense with a lodger. "What do you think of that, my dear?" she concluded, triumphantly.

"Jessie writes in the best possible spirits. Mr. Downing (*such* a gentlemanly young man, my dear) is a beginner, you know, and they are only in lodgings. He is engineer in some railway—something to do with iron; but he hopes soon to get a better appointment. How sorry Jessie was not to have you for a bridesmaid!"

The contrast of Madeline's second uninvited visit to her grandmother from the first struck her very forcibly. A poor, helpless, heart-broken child at the first, shrinking from the harshness of material prosperity, yet having nowhere else to turn. She was now a woman, not a very prosperous one, it is true, yet having something to give in exchange for her daily bread, with some knowledge of life and her own position in it, yet still, alas! terribly alone. However, she had now a tolerable estimate of her own strength and weakness, so she felt composed, even joyous, in her sense of freedom as she rang the bell at No. 13, Abingdon Villas, the day after her arrival in London. All was unchanged. The dining-room as neat and stiff as ever, Mrs. Redman's cap as huge, while she herself did not look a day older than when Madeline left. Not so poor Miss Foster, who looked faded and worn, but sat in much the same position, and reading the *Times* aloud, as she had been the day that amiable villain Kit, *alias* Fitzwarrenne, had "bearded the lioness in her den," and given an impetus to the fortunes of Madeline Digby.

On her side, Mrs. Redman could scarce believe her eyes or ears when the servant announced Miss Digby, and an elegant, un-English looking lady, in most fashionable black, well gloved and well mannered, glided into the room. Insensibly the tyrannical old woman felt her reign was at an end.

The indescribable tone, the supreme good style of the young waif's manner and appearance, nay, the polished deference and politeness she evinced towards Mrs. Redman herself, put that

severe individual in her right, or, as *she* thought, wrong position. On the persecuted Miss Foster, Madeline bestowed the warmest greeting, and Mrs. Redman evinced a true gossiping interest in all the particulars of Madame de Fontarce's death and its results. She was sceptical and bitter about the old lady having nothing to leave. "Take my word for it, she had sunk everything to purchase a good annuity, and I am not sure she was not in the right. Take care of yourself, and your friends will like you the better; and now I suppose you want money or something!"

How delighted Madeline was to reply that she did not; that she had sufficient until she secured employment, which she did not fear being able to do; that she was staying with Mrs. Moorcroft, and after this morning, which she had devoted to Mrs. Redman, she would be occupied placing her name on the books of divers institutions, therefore she could not call soon again at Abingdon Villas, but would report progress as soon as she could.

"'Pon my word," said Mrs. Redman, sorely vexed to see the girl slipping out of her grasp, "you seem to have taken the management of everything into your own hands."

"And is it not time?" asked Madeline, with a smile. "Have I not been a burden to you, to every one, long enough?"

Madeline's well-bred cheerfulness, her sweet voice, and high, gentle spirit, at last began to tell upon the ill-tempered grandmother, who said somewhat more graciously, "Well, you can stay and have some dinner with us, at least." This Madeline readily accepted, and Miss Foster immediately proposed she should go upstairs and take off her bonnet, thereby securing a private gossip, in which she showed, unintentionally, that she was much weakened in health and spirits.

Madeline was inexpressibly affected by the alteration in this her first and only friend in the respectable circle of Abingdon Villas. How ardently did she long to be rich, to be able to carry Miss Foster away to some bright country home, and cherish and tend that simple, gentle, fading creature. She felt inclined to cry over her; but this would do no one good, so she spoke to her with warmth and cheerfulness, and told her how much good she had done to herself, and how she hoped occasionally to come and see her wherever she was, till the poor companion quite brightened up, and began to think there was a bit of blue sky for her too, somewhere.

The dinner was a wearisome business, and soon after Madeline prepared to return, asking leave for Miss Foster to come with her to secure a place in the omnibus for Camden Town. This was reluctantly granted, and Miss Foster gladly availed herself of the permission. Madeline did not fail to inquire after and leave a message for Mr. John, who, Miss Foster informed her, had mar-

ried a wealthy widow about a year before. Madeline almost smiled at her own shrinking from the crowded omnibus, the vulgar details of English life, its unartistic aspect, its very homeliness of comfort. The whole conduct of life with Madame de Fontarce had been thrifty to meanness, yet there was not the smallest commonness in anything. Madeline was very seldom *en voiture*, but then she never entered an omnibus. There were no extraordinary distances to compel the use of this unaristocratic but most convenient conveyance; but then the idea of being free to walk about alone was in itself a compensation for nearly all small annoyances.

CHAPTER XIV.

MADELINE'S hours fled rapidly while under Mrs. Moorcroft's roof; she practised on Jessie's little piano, the sound of which brought tears to Mrs. Moorcroft's eyes; and she was much occupied in the intervals of visiting the various governesses' institutions, where she had entered her name and qualifications, in remodelling and making her aunt's dresses. Then Mrs. Moorcroft and Sam, between them, managed to dispose of some lace Madeline wished to sell, to much better advantage than she had done in Paris, so that, for the first time in her life, she found herself mistress of fifteen bright golden sovereigns and a good wardrobe.

"Why, dearest Mrs. Moorcroft," she exclaimed, the evening the above sum was handed to her, "I am a millionaire! I shall next get a situation, and then I shall hoard my money until I am rich —so rich, that Mrs. Redman will not be ashamed to own me."

"Well," said Mr. Sam, with unusual energy, "if ever any one deserved it, you do—I mean, success."

Mr. Sam now came almost every evening to tea, and insisted on treating his mother and Madeline to the Crystal Palace, and would have added other treats, had not Madeline been so intent on her search for employment. In truth, though she would not have said so for worlds, Mr. Sam and his treats were dreadful inflictions; with Mrs. Moorcraft she was always happy and content, but she shrank, with a feeling she could neither repress nor define, from contact with men of Sam Moorcroft's sort, as from a certain degradation. Yet, she had not a trace of foolish pride. She was annoyed, and reasoned with herself, but in vain; instinct was stronger than reason or common sense, and she was by nature an aristocrat, though she would have laughed at you if you told her so.

She had been a fortnight with Mrs. Moorcroft, and was beginning to feel very anxious about employment. It was Monday, and

steadily refusing an expedition to Hampton Court, planned and arranged by Mr. Sam, she went away, early, to the governesses' institution, intending to ask the superintendent's advice respecting the prudence of advertising. This lady had always shown her civility, and so far interested herself as to counsel her not to accept too small a salary; as a pupil of Signor G——'s, she ought to command a fair remuneration. There were not many candidates at the long table, whereon lay the books of reference, both for governesses seeking engagements, and ladies seeking governesses.

The superintendent was sitting at the inner side of the table, near a sofa, on which sat a lady who was speaking, not absolutely loud, but in a clear deliberate tone, that conveyed her words most distinctly to every one present.

She was a tall, broad-shouldered woman, with a dark-complexioned resolute face, small dark eyes, iron-grey hair, and a wide thin-lipped mouth. Her eyes fixed themselves keenly on Madeline, as she entered, with a little Parisian half-curtsy to the superintendent. She was well dressed, this lady— a rich watered black silk, a plain white bonnet, an Indian shawl, though it was warm, huddled round her, rather than put on; and a thick gold chain, to which hung a gold-mounted eye-glass—the said eye-glass being soon brought to bear on Madeline, who felt a little uneasy, for a moment, under its inspection. Madeline felt it difficult to assign this personage her place in the social world; there was not the slightest vulgarity about her, neither was there refinement; she was evidently a woman of position, and yet had not the dignity of rank. While Madeline stole glances at, and thought about her, she continued to talk in the same audible key, as though fearless or indifferent whether the whole world knew her affairs, or not.

"You see, I have but little time. I leave town on Saturday, positively; and I must take some one down with me. I despatched Miss—oh!—the last you recommended—before I left; she was a monster of accomplishments, but her English was so provincial, that I would not have left her alone with my girls for three times her salary. I do not want them to be monsters of accomplishments, but I want them to be well-informed gentlewomen. You must help me Mrs. (I am ashamed to say I forget your name). I should be sorry to go anywhere else, for Lady Montgomery and myself are determined to uphold the institution in every way; so do the best you can for me. What have you at present?"

"Well, I fear we have scarce anything suited to your ladyship," said the superintendent, evidently anxious to please this important personage; "you want good music?"

"Yes," returned her ladyship, turning over a book of names, "I must have good music; you see, the next seven months we

shall be in the country, and much can be done, or undone, in that time; besides, it's useful in many ways. I must have first-rate music."

"The young lady just come in," whispered the superintendent, "is a pupil of Signor G——'s."

"Oh! indeed!" returned the lady, in her clear tones, closing the book, and putting up her glass once more to examine Madeline. "But she wouldn't do; she is too young. Anything else?"

"There is a French lady, who was disengaged yesterday—and——"

"No, no! I have had worry enough with French ladies. They are all very well in their own country, but they do not export good specimens." Again looking steadily at Madeline—"If she was not quite so young!—ask her to come round and speak to me."

Whereupon the superintendent, addressing Madeline, said, "Will you be so good as to come here, Miss Digby, Lady Templemore wishes to speak to you?"

Madeline immediately complied, and the superintendent resigned her chair to her.

"How old are you?" asked Lady Templemore, abruptly.

"I was nineteen in April last."

Lady Templemore shook her head.

"You look more, however, and that is fortunate. One of my daughters is nearly seventeen; I am afraid you would be like a play-fellow to her."

Madeline smiled.

"Where have you been before?"

"I have only taught in a school."

"Then you have been trained to it; I fancied you were not. Mrs. ——, I forget her name, tells me you are a pupil of G——'s."

"I had thirteen lessons from him."

"Good; I like accuracy. Why didn't you go on with the other half dozen?"

"Because my aunt, who was good enough to procure them for me, died, and I was left alone."

"Ha! What countrywoman are you? I fancy I detect a tinge of Irish in your voice."

"My father was Irish, my mother English; both are dead. I have been educated in London and Paris."

Lady Templemore looked at her watch.

"I have no more time now," she said, "but if you like to call upon me this afternoon, about six o'clock, I can speak further to you. I may engage you or I may not, for I am afraid you are too young and inexperienced, so do not lose anything, meantime, for

the chance of my closing with you. Don't be late, for I have only a quarter of an hour to spare at that time." Then taking out a richly-ornamented card-case, she gave Madeline a card. "Good morning, miss. Mrs. Tucker—ah! that's it, I want you for a moment," and with a swift long step, she left the room, followed by the lady superintendent.

Madeline looked no further through the books that morning, but putting away Lady Templemore's card carefully in her pocket, hastened back to Ashley Villas, to inform Mrs. Moorcroft, who had been half offended at her persistent refusal to join the party to Hampton Court, of the chance she would have lost, had she not been firm.

"Well, my dear," returned the kind-hearted matron, "I hope it will all turn out satisfactory, but I don't much like your account of the lady, and she said nothing that I can make out about salary."

"My dear Mrs. Moorcroft, I must sacrifice all that to get a start; I am determined not to lose any more time. What should I have done, had I not had a friend so kind and hospitable as yourself? You have been a mother to me!" and Madeline kissed her.

"Indeed!" returned Mrs. Moorcroft, with peculiar emphasis. "It is my wish that you *should* look on me as a mother, such are my feelings towards you."

"Oh!" cried Madeline, tenderly, "God is very good in raising me up such friends. He will reward you for your friendship to one so forlorn, as I would be without it."

Mrs. Moorcroft, who was easily moved to tears, used her handkerchief audibly, and, patting Madeline on the back, set about getting dinner ready, that Madeline might be strengthened and refreshed for her long expedition in the afternoon. Lady Templemore's card bore the address "Rutland Gate, Hyde Park," some miles distant, and Madeline was determined to start early, preferring to wait rather than lose her chance.

Lady Templemore had not come in when Madeline reached her residence. It was a large, stately mansion, though partly shut up,—the furniture covered with brown-holland and silver-paper. A solemn, clerical-looking man opened the door, and told Madeline to walk in, as he presumed she was the lady her ladyship expected; so he ushered her into a morning-room, on the entrance-floor, a little more uncovered than the other rooms, of which Madeline caught a glimpse as she passed.

It had pictures, and bronzes, and looking-glasses, bookcases, bright chintz furniture, a very business-looking writing table, with rows of drawers to the ground, and an opening in the centre to sit at, a work-basket, overflowing with knitting and embroidery, and a pile of letters and papers, journals and newspapers, completed the mixture of *utile et dulce*, remarkable in all the

arrangements. The windows opened upon a large, well-kept garden, the cool green of which was most refreshing to Madeline, after her long and dusty transit. She had not time, however, to do more than take in these details, when Lady Templemore entered rapidly but quietly, and walking straight to the chair before the writing-table, sat down, saying "that's right! nothing like being up to time. Now, you mustn't mind waiting a few minutes longer. I have a line to write before post-hour, and there, there's to-day's *Times*."

Madeline took it, and covered her observation of the speaker with its friendly expanse.

Lady Templemore was dressed in the same attire she had worn in the morning. She looked a little tired, but proceeded with the same rapidity which distinguished most of her actions, to open and glance over several letters which lay upon the table; her countenance looked hard, as she was thus absorbed, but it was frank and bold.

Madeline did not fancy her especially, neither was she repelled. Presently, Lady Templemore seized a pen, scratched a few lines quickly and noisily, addressed and fastened the envelope, struck a bell which lay beside her, and handed the missive to the solemn man, who entered almost immediately, with the words "at once;" then, turning abruptly on Madeline, said, "And you think yourself equal, at nineteen, to guide and control a girl scarce two years younger?"

"I am not at all sure of that," replied Madeline. "A good deal would depend on the young lady herself. I might be a useful companion. At all events," she added, "I have been taught self-control in a severe school, and that is something."

"Where were you, and how long, in Paris?"

"At the convent of the Annonciades. I was nearly two years in Paris."

"I hope you are not a Catholic?" said Lady Templemore, suddenly speaking in French—very fair French for an Englishwoman of her age. "I am not bigoted, but it is a nuisance having one member of a household differing in religion from the rest; besides, ours is a very Protestant county, and it would never do."

"I am a Protestant of the Church of England," replied Madeline, "and more attached to Protestantism on leaving than on entering the convent."

Then, still in French, Madeline's examiner put a few leading queries on the subject of English literature, history, &c., showing herself possessed of a good general knowledge.

"You certainly have the true Parisian accent," she said at last, returning to English. "Now oblige me by letting me hear you

sing and play," motioning towards a cottage piano, which occupied one side of the room.

Madeline silently untied her bonnet, and then said, "It is rather a nervous affair, playing or singing under these circumstances. I beg you will not imagine I am doing my best."

"It *is* trying," said Lady Templemore. "I shall make allowance: but I cannot engage a governess in the dark."

Madeline, of course, did herself great injustice. Nevertheless, Lady Templemore professed herself satisfied.

"You are young, too young," she said, "still I will try you. My salary is sixty pounds a year; but, as this is your first attempt, you ought to be satisfied with fifty."

"I am quite satisfied," said Madeline.

"Then as to references?"

Madeline gave her grandmother's, and Mr. John Redman's City address.

"This one will do," said Lady Templemore. "I will get my man of business to see this Mr. Redman to-morrow; no doubt it will prove all right. I shall then write to you, and you must be ready to start with me at nine o'clock on Saturday morning from the Euston Station. Do not fear to acknowledge your inexperience, and if you are in any difficulty, come to me. I know my daughters thoroughly; and though I do not talk sentiment, I shall value a governess who proves really useful to them. You give me the idea of common sense, otherwise I would not get over your youth. I have two girls; they will be your care. Now, have I your address? Good; and here is your uncle's. Now I must go. I have given you half instead of a quarter of an hour." She struck the bell. "Here, Trussler, open the door for this lady; get her a cab, or anything she wants. I will write without fail to-morrow. Good morning, Miss Digby," and gathering up some letters, she walked away, leaving Madeline to the care of the clerical-looking individual who had shown her in.

Inexpressibly thankful of such an opening, Madeline walked on across the Park, unconscious of the many admiring glances bestowed on her graceful figure and carriage; and then, in her ignorance, got into the wrong omnibus, and so lost much time. It was nearly eight o'clock, and almost dark, when she reached Ashley Villas, a good deal tired and nervous at being so much alone.

Mr. Sam had arrived some time before, and Mrs. Moorcroft was on the look-out for Madeline's return.

"Well, dear, what news?" she cried, anxiously.

"I think I have succeeded," replied Madeline, smiling faintly; "but oh, I am so tired!"

Then a cup of tea ensued, and Madeline detailed her interview.

Mrs. Moorcroft thought Lady Templemore was somewhat awful, and shabby into the bargain, for taking off ten pounds in consequence of Madeline's inexperience. But the effect of all this intelligence on Mr. Sam was extraordinary. He sat in a brown study for some time, and then proceeded to stir his tea with the sugar-tongs. On being remonstrated with he became crimson, and covered with confusion. Then his mother asked him what he thought of Madeline's engagement, for all considered it a fixed thing, and his reply was very singular,—

"If Miss Digby had only come with us this morning, all this affair might have been avoided; and it may be very troublesome, and it is not wise to do anything in a hurry."

"Why, Sam," said Mrs. Moorcroft, laughing, "what in the world are you talking about? only I have been with you all day, I should think you had been taking more wine or brandy-and-water than was good for you."

"But," returned Sam, proceeding to spread butter on the loaf vehemently with the butter-knife, "the choice between a home of one's own, and residing with a screw like this Lady Templemore, none could hesitate to make; it is not grandeur, but sincerity and comfort, that makes no place like home," and with this lucid observation Mr. Samuel Moorcroft betook himself to his tea and silence, from which he roused to give his listeners an unusually full description of his business prospects, his plans, and hopes of finding a wife to whom he would be the most devoted of husbands.

The mother looked serious, and threw in little sympathetic observations from time to time.

Madeline, after the first passing amusement at Mr. Sam's absurdities, seized the first opportunity to say she must write a line to her uncle, to prepare him for the application which would probably be made to him the next day, and for this purpose went to fetch her writing-book; on her return Mr. Sam had disappeared.

The whole of the following day was taken up in sundry preparations for her expected start on the Saturday following, as Madeline proposed to devote the next day to a visit to Mrs. Redman, when she expected to be able to inform her of the final ratification of her engagement with Lady Templemore.

It was a pleasant day, the pleasantest Madeline had passed since she had parted with childhood. She was now on the high road to independence. She could save up, certainly, the next year and a half's salary, and then be free to choose her own career. She might love her pupils, two nice young creatures, doubtless, who would love her. Lady Templemore, too, seemed just, though hard; and Madeline knew, if she only got justice, she could satisfy

the requirements of the position she had undertaken; so the day passed rapidly. Mrs. Moorcroft had gone out on some errand of her own, and Madeline, thinking it must be tea-time, descended to the common sitting-room, and found its only occupant Mr. Sam, who was walking up and down, and looking pale and uncomfortable. Madeline greeted him as usual, asked if his mother had not returned, and sat down; whereupon, to her astonishment and dismay, Mr. Sam burst into a declaration of love, jumbling up his feelings and finances in a very eccentric and ungrammatical fashion.

Poor Madeline was overwhelmed and grieved beyond description, especially as Mr. Sam by no means appeared to anticipate a refusal. At last, however, she managed to make him comprehend that it was impossible she could accept him.

"But why not, Miss Digby? I always thought, and mother thought, you rather liked me. You know you let me have your photograph, and took my arm that day at the Crystal Palace, and I always intended to marry you—that is, to propose for you—ever since your first visit here. Now, do take time and consider the matter. Think of a home of your own."

"It would only worry you if I were to take time. My dear Mr. Moorcroft, I am deeply flattered, but it is quite out of the question."

"You don't say so! And there, I've gone and written to your Uncle Redman; and we might have had such a good business connection through him. He was over at our place to-day, an uncommon fine man, and gave his consent, most gentlemanly. Well, this *is* a disappointment! Mother will be quite vexed; and excuse me, Miss Digby, but you may repent it."

"Perhaps *you* would, if I had accepted," said Madeline, somewhat reassured by the tone her swain assumed. "But I am inexpressibly vexed to be obliged, however temporarily, to cause annoyance to any of you, kind and good as you have been to me," and tears of vexation started to her eyes.

How unfortunate she was! She felt it was not in human nature, at least a mother's nature, not to resent the rejection of a son, and she was truly grieved that anything should disturb her relations with the worthy Mrs. Moorcroft. She felt more alone than ever when Mr. Sam, with an irrepressible exclamation of intense vexation, rushed from the room. Madeline retreated to her own chamber and had a good cry; there she remained till Mrs. Moorcroft asked for admittance, and entered, looking very grave. Her first words, however, were sympathetic, though piqued.

"I am so sorry you have been worried, dear," she exclaimed. "But never mind; dry your eyes and come down. I shall take no notice; it will pass over. I think Sam deserves a princess,

which is but natural, you know, he is such a good son. I wish you could have married him."

So Madeline came down, feeling like a culprit, and spent a miserable evening. Mrs. Moorcroft sighed a good deal, and called her Miss Digby.

The following morning, glad to leave the house, she started early for Mrs. Redman's abode, having received the promised note from Lady Templemore, and was surprised by an unusually warm reception. Miss Foster, too, was full of "nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles."

"I see you have heard of my good fortune," said Madeline, warming to a gleam of sympathy. "I suppose Mr. John must have told you?"

"Quite right," said grandmamma, absolutely relaxing to a smile. "And so it is all settled, is it? When is it to come off?"

"Oh! on Saturday," replied Madeline, thinking the query curiously worded.

"On Saturday!" echoed Mrs. Redman, in a loud key of astonishment. "Well, that is quick work? Why, it is scarcely decent! If you had acted properly, I was going to allow the marriage to come off here."

"The marriage!" repeated Madeline, in her turn. "There is no question of a marriage! I spoke of my engagement as governess to Lady Templemore."

An explanation now ensued. Mr. John had informed his mother of Sam Moorcroft's proposal; that he was a rising man, and that it was a capital chance for Madeline, on whose acceptance all parties appeared to have reckoned. The announcement of her decided refusal called down a torrent of indignation and vituperation on Madeline's devoted head. "What, was she keeping herself for the Prince of Wales? Since she had been with that impostor of an aunt in Paris, nothing but countesses would do for her, indeed! Wait, however, and she would see the difference. What did she mean by refusing a respectable man, who was quite good enough for such a poor, dependent creature as her?"

At last Madeline's strong self-command gave way, or, rather, she deliberately chose to express her feelings for once. She therefore gave back Mrs. Redman's insolence with a cool daring, a concentrated indignation, that astonished and for a moment silenced the respectable matron, and made Miss Foster turn pale with terror.

"How dare you speak to me in such a tone?" she said, in a low, clear voice. "What has been my error, save the misfortune of poverty? And is this to destroy my future, and bind me hand and foot in a marriage which might be my ruin? You deceive

yourself with the names of things, and you have no right to be angry with me for refusing to accede to a repugnant marriage. It is time you should adopt another tone towards me. From this day forward I will never cost you a shilling. I regret that you compel me to feel the burden of an obligation without the gratitude that ought to accompany it." And Madeline rose to leave.

However, Mrs. Redman recovered herself sufficiently to *de*-nounce and *re*-nounce her granddaughter. She should never hear or see her more, and Miss Foster was also forbidden, under tremendous penalties, ever to hold any further communication with her. So Madeline was banished from Abingdon Villas.

The next two days were long and painful, though Mrs. Moorcroft was mournfully kind. At last Saturday morning came, clear and bright.

With many tears Madeline parted from Mrs. Moorcroft, who positively melted at the sight of her distress. In due time Lady Templemore, with her maid and footman, joined her at the station, and greeted her civilly.

"Do not trouble yourself about your ticket; I will get it for you," she said.

A few minutes more and Madeline was whirling away into a new phase of her life, but neither so joyously or hopefully as she would have done had she not inspired Mr. Samuel Moorcroft with the tender passion.

CHAPTER XV.

LIFE now offered a totally new page to Madeline Digby, unlike all her previous experience, and there was much in it which delighted her at first.

"The Grange," Lady Templemore's country seat, was situated on the Welsh border, within an hour's drive of the old cathedral town of Greybridge. I say Lady Templemore's advisedly, for her money bought it, and her will kept the family there during the principal part of the interval between the London seasons.

There was a Lord Templemore, 'tis true, but then he was of no great importance to himself or any one else. He had some four-and-twenty years before sold his title and liberty to the wealthy heiress of Mr. Ephraim Grey, ship-owner and general merchant, Liverpool, a man of whose wealth the general public stood in awe; and on the whole, Lord Templemore made a very good thing of it.

It is true, from the nature of things, he soon found himself bound hand and foot by the will of his wife, but that would have

been his lot whoever he had married. It is also true that she gave him a fair allowance of pocket money, of which she asked an account, but only when he wanted his quarter too much in advance. Then she was a well-tempered woman, and "kept him comfortable," as industrious but humble matrons often do their ne'er-do-well spouses, and he must have felt that this was much better for him than squandering his last shilling on sharper friends of both sexes, at pleasant easy-going German watering places, and Italian casinos, which would infallibly have been his fate had not Miss Elizabeth Grey taken him "for better for worse."

He had uncommonly little of his own, however, to squander, a far-reaching line of Hibernian ancestors had lived too long like "rale gintlemen" on the family estate, to leave the subject of this sketch more than the hereditary situation of receiver for the creditors and victim-in-ordinary to the family attorney. Nevertheless Lord Templemore enjoyed life according to the "eternal boyhood of an Irishman's nature," as some one somewhere admirably designates it. He was a tall, handsome, sandy-haired man, with a soft, sweet, womanish smile, a kindly heart, an easy, irresolute, rather self-indulgent nature, very fond and slightly afraid of his wife; he would probably have been unfaithful to a handsome woman who worshipped him, if he had *not* feared her. Doting on his children, whom he spoiled as far as opportunity was allowed, and much devoted to field sports, adored by the female domestics and popular with the men, who yet rather patronised him. He was a great catch at a hunt or charity dinner, as he could make an admirable speech, and put every one in good humour, and very popular with his neighbours; of no particular politics except his wife's, for he did not care one straw for anything that did not concern him personally, as he left all the trouble of life to Lady Templemore, who desired nothing better.

Ah! what a man of business—what a committee man, railway director, and legislator, was lost to the country, when nature imprisoned the spirit of Lady Templemore in a female covering. Business of some kind was her only recreation, yet she was quite above meddling with any other person's, nor had she a woman's bustling enthusiastic affectation of business; she went at it with the calm thoroughness of a man's vocation; she kept the most voluminous accounts; she held every line of her large expenditure thoroughly in hand; she could tell where to retrench and where to expand, were either alternative placed before her, in a moment.

Then she invested money in respectable undertakings, and had a vast correspondence with men of business, and she managed her large household liberally and economically, being a strict but just mistress. Besides all these occupations she had chalked out her children's roads in life, and was resolved that nothing should be

left undone to fit and train them for the lines and positions she had laid down. She was really a very admirable and useful woman, but perfectly free from weakness of any kind; tears were a mystery to her, kisses and caresses idiotic, and totally unnecessary indications of good will; sentiment, a sort of permitted lunacy, which in a more highly developed condition of common sense would lead to a keeper and an injunction giving the management of property to the next (unsentimental) of kin.

This well assorted couple had three children living. Lord Bracklyn, the only son, and the Ladies Elizabeth and Agnes Grey Temple, for the business name was prefixed to that of the noble lord her servant.

Of course the children loved papa, and obeyed mamma, to whom she was a great ruling power who could be pleased with obedience only.

The Grange was an old place, with a new house standing on the slope of a hill, commanding a splendid view over a rich but flat plain, its principal features a winding river and the ancient cathedral towers. The woods surrounding the house were luxuriant and of old date, and the hill on which it stood crowned by the ruins of a Norman fortress built in ages past to awe the marches; from this the descent into a valley was abrupt, and beyond were a range of blue hills, and woods, and gentlemen's residences, and on the right a view of a wide spreading river, and ultimately a glimpse of the sea.

Madeline had no idea of the order, the luxury, the exquisite fitness of all things in a house of this class, neither could she have imagined so much of form and routine in the bosom of a family. Her own and her pupils' apartments were distinct from the rest of the family.

Lord Bracklyn had his bed and sitting-room at present unoccupied. Lady Templemore had her morning-room (she disdained the term boudoir) besides a dressing-room, both apartments devoted to business, though of different descriptions. Then "my lord" had his study, as it was misnamed. Then came family rooms and public rooms, to say nothing of housekeeper's and servant's rooms, and *loci* where Madeline never penetrated.

The stables and offices were an architectural village, and the array of servants conveyed to and from church in a species of omnibus, of a Sunday, enough to make the heart of a paymaster sink within him.

The bed-chamber assigned to Madeline was exceedingly pretty and comfortable, large enough to be also a sitting-room, with abundant wardrobes, a sofa, a writing-table, bright chintz curtains, and all the elegancies of a well appointed sleeping-room. The windows commanded a pretty home view at the back of the

house, and it communicated with the room occupied by Lady Elizabeth, her eldest pupil.

Then the young ladies' study was a delightful apartment, with all appliances and incentives to study; moreover she had a neat almost lady-like young woman to wait upon her, known as the school-room maid. Lady Templemore had clearly and shortly told Madeline the hours and routine of the house. When the family were alone, all breakfasted together in the small breakfast-room; Madeline and Lady Agnes would dine at the luncheon hour, Lady Elizabeth also when the house was full, but with her father and mother when there was no company, at which time also the presence of Miss Digby and her youngest pupil of an evening in the drawing-room would be acceptable.

"Now," concluded Lady Templemore, "all the school-room arrangements I leave to you; of course, get the girls on with music, speak nothing but French to them, but make them read and get as much general information as possible. If you find any difficulties consult me, and if there is anything careless or uncomfortable in the service, complain. I hope, however, all will go well; whatever you do, keep the girls employed and wide awake."

It was all very strange at first. The books from which the Ladies Grey Temple had learned were almost all new to Madeline. However, she was quite equal to working with unaccustomed tools, and soon, with her pupils, settled into a routine of study and exercise not unpleasant, though very monotonous.

Lady Elizabeth was a lady-like girl, nearly seventeen, a weak likeness of her mother, cold as Lady Templemore, without her ability, matter of fact without her sense of justice. It was difficult to interest her in anything, yet she was not actively ill-tempered, though a little inclined to be sullen. Agnes, the youngest, was an interesting little creature, just emerging from childhood, not unlike her governess in appearance, especially in the pale gold hair. She was a nervous, impressionable, delicate girl, easy to teach but difficult to fix, very loving, very impetuous—she had generally been in disgrace with every one except her father, who loved her best. He first noticed the sort of likeness between his youngest daughter and the new governess; moreover, his lordship condescended to ask Miss Digby as to her family, saying in his pleasant way that he had some relatives himself of that name, but Madeline simply and truly professed total ignorance of her Irish relations, instinctive tact telling her that a possible connection with "my lord" would do her no good."

Madeline found too, she had a good deal of time to herself at this period, just before the shooting began; Lord Templemore was fond of taking out his daughters for long expeditions on

horseback, and this exercise Lady Templemore approved, it was therefore permitted, and Madeline had the command of a piano, with abundance of new music; and also, which she valued more, an excellent library. Lady Templemore occasionally invited her to accompany her on various charitable and inquisitorial expeditions, just enough to lend the governess weight and consequence, and at first Madeline was inclined to believe, with the hopefulness of youth, that she was going to make fast friends, nay a real home, at the Grange, everything ran so smoothly and pleasantly. But as time rolled on she began to perceive that she never seemed to make any advance on the sympathies and interest of her employers. Lady Agnes, 'tis true, conceived a most ardent fancy for her governess, but this was by no means a point in Madeline's favour with Lady Templemore—she hated all sorts of enthusiasm, and was almost indignant that any child of hers should be so impressionable and volatile as Lady Agnes, to whom perhaps she was more unjust than to any other creature.

However, the extreme calm of Madeline's manners re-assured her ladyship, who little dreamed the fire which lay beneath that composed exterior, the ambition, the self-reliance, the strength, of that young, slight, gentle girl.

The routine of the day soon fixed itself: there was an early breakfast for Lady Templemore, before which Madeline and her pupils frequently enjoyed a stroll in the first freshness of morning round the gardens, and even the home wood, a piece of plantation near the house. Then came study and music, till the two o'clock luncheon, after which Madeline generally had some hours to herself, while the young ladies either drove with their mother or rode on horseback with Lord Templemore. In the evening, Madeline, with Lady Agnes, joined the circle in the drawing-room, where the new governess's musical powers were frequently put in requisition by Lord Templemore, who loved music, and had exquisite taste therein. He always enjoyed an Irish melody, a French romance, or a German ballad, when sung by Madeline, and even some of the simpler Italian airs. She feared his criticism too much to venture on any of the more difficult.

So time slipped by. Often the usual dinner-time was made earlier to avoid riding in the heat of day, and then Madeline had the whole evening to herself, and used to wander about the grounds, and sit and muse among the ruins of the old castle, reviewing the past and its various changes. How incredible and dream-like it all appeared! The old scrambling theatrical days with her father! After all, *they* were the most fondly remembered; though she did not deceive herself into imagining she would like them over again. For a love of all that is beautiful and refined was developing itself more and more every day. Ug-

liness, unsuitable dress, and ruggedness were utterly repugnant to her.

Then the sad sort of hopeless life at Miss Jones's, the episode of a convent, the life with her aunt. How far gone by it seemed! and scarce three months had passed since the curtain had dropped upon that scene.

Now, how much more hopeful she felt; why, she could hardly say, save that her surroundings were more agreeable, and that she had made her first step in life; otherwise she was as much alone as ever. More so; for the Moorcrofts could not be to her what they were, since she had inflicted so much mortification and even grief, on that simple household. Then her grandmother was still incensed against her, so Miss Foster informed her, *sub rosa*, for that much-enduring woman still continued furtively to correspond with her old *protegé*. Yet Madeline was hopeful. She trusted by the end of a year and a half to be in sufficient funds to maintain herself free of remuneration during a year which she calculated would train her for the stage. At least her loneliness gave her liberty. If none interested themselves in her, at least none had a right to control her; yet with all the marvellous strength she possessed, how often would she twine her little hands together and cry to God for love, even if it brought the strongest curb, for to her hitherto law and love had been divorced. Oh! the desolation of feeling the world was before her with no loving hand to direct her choice! She scarce dared allow herself to love Lady Agnes as she was inclined, certainly not to show it; yet when she looked at herself in the glass, dressed in her evening *demi-toilette* of rich soft black silk—for her costume was older than her years (her inheritance from her aunt, and Lady Templemore's objection to her youth, fitting in wonderfully), she mentally measured herself, and recalled her aunt's assertion, that though neither beautiful nor striking, she was *séduisante*. She would murmur to herself, "It will not be always thus. I have that in me to win notice and affection, and a place; I have not yet come to my real life."

Madeline had been about six weeks a member of Lady Templemore's family, when the eldest son, Lord Bracklyn, returned from a summer ramble in the Tyrol. He was his mother's favourite. She had hoped great things from him, because he was silent and impassive. She always expected to see him bloom out into something remarkable and practical, but Lord Bracklyn was now twenty-two, and had as yet given no sign.

One morning at breakfast Lady Templemore, on opening one of her numerous letters, said to her eldest daughter (Lord Templemore was seldom up or down in time for his wife's breakfast), "This is from Bracklyn; he will be here to dinner to-day."

"I hope he will bring me some of those pretty carvings they do so wonderfully in the Tyrol," said Lady Agnes, and no more notice was taken at the time. But in the course of the morning Lady Agnes observed—

"You have never seen my brother, Miss Digby?"

"Never," replied Madeline.

"Then I do not think you will like him."

"Why?" asked Madeline smiling; "don't you like him?"

"Well no! not very much. He never seems to care for any one but himself, and one cannot like that sort of person."

"How can you talk so foolishly, Agnes?" said Lady Elizabeth. "Mamma would be very angry with you if she heard it. Miss Digby, Bracklyn is very nice and sensible, and mamma thinks he will make a good figure in the House of Commons when he gets in."

"His tailor will do that for him," laughed the irreverent Lady Agnes. "If he were a different sort of man he should fall in love with you, dear, darling Miss Digby; but you are a great deal too nice for him. You ought to have Ivanhoe or Brian de Bois Guilbert. Oh! I liked Brian de Bois Guilbert."

Madeline absolutely shivered with horror.

"Lady Agnes, I shall be seriously offended if you allow yourself to talk in so unpleasant and rude a manner. What would Lady Templemore say if she heard you chatter so foolishly?"

"But I am not going to let her hear me," said Lady Agnes, kissing her governess defiantly. "Why do you try to scold me. You know you are not a stiff thing like all the rest."

In the evening Lady Agnes was sent for to see her brother, and did not return, so Madeline spent it alone, not liking to intrude upon the family reunion, especially as she had not been invited.

It was the following evening before she met the heir of the house. She was with Lady Agnes in the drawing-room as usual before the rest of the family came in from dinner. When they came in, Lady Templemore said slightly—

"My son, Miss Digby;" and a tall, thin young man, with a sallow narrow face, and thin straggling whiskers, dark eyes with red edges, cold quiet mouth, and heavy jaw, bowed carelessly, and seating himself in a deep lounging-chair, applied his mind to the perusal of a morning paper. He had a look of his mother, without her quick intelligent glance or energetic manner. He reclined in this lounge the whole evening, sometimes bestowing monosyllabic replies upon his mother and sister, generally affecting to read the paper.

Lord Templemore asked Madeline to sing, both alone and with her pupils, and asked his son if he did not think Agnes very

much improved in style and expression? And Lord Bracklyn said "Very."

Lady Agnes asked him about travelling in the Tyrol, and he said it was like travelling everywhere else.

"I thought it was a mountainous country," said his sister quietly, "but all the world is flat to you."

"Agnes," said her brother in a quiet voice, yet Lady Agnes started, "do not be ill-bred and uncivil. Miss Digby blushes for you." This was quite true, for dreading that this outbreak might be attributed to want of sufficiently severe discipline, Madeline's cheek flushed, and when she looked up, she met Lord Bracklyn's eyes fixed upon her from behind his paper, she fancied with an expression of contemptuous disapprobation, and she felt altogether uncomfortable. However, the evening passed tranquilly over, and about ten Lord Bracklyn rose, yawned, and walked quietly away.

"Where is Bracklyn?" asked his father, shortly after.

"Gone to bed, I suppose," said Lady Templemore.

"Or to smoke," said Lady Elizabeth.

"Well, I will join him in a cigar," said Lord Templemore. "We have not had a word about the first of September yet," and he bid them courteously good-night.

Several days passed, and except an occasional glimpse of an evening, Madeline saw nothing of the son and heir, whom she thought by far the most uninteresting personage of the family.

There was a great Sunday School *fête* and juvenile gathering, the first week in September, at a neighbouring magnate's, and Lord and Lady Templemore, and their two daughters, were to grace it with their presence.

Lord Bracklyn had gone into Wales to a bachelor friend's, to enjoy the first of the shooting, and was to return when the party, regularly collected by his mother for the enjoyment of the Grange preserves, were assembled.

Madeline assisted to dress Lady Agnes, who, carefully secluded in general, was wild with delight at the prospect of dancing on the grass, a band, &c.

"I wish you were coming, dear Miss Digby."

But Madeline valued a whole day's lonely freedom far too much to relinquish it readily. As soon as the party were fairly off, she enjoyed a long practice, then a long reading in her own room. A letter to Jessie Moorcroft ensued. Then dinner, served in the school-room, after which, she put on her broad-leafed grey straw hat, and strolled through the shady woods to the ruined fortalice at the top of the hill, where she sat and mused, and did a few stitches of her fancy-work, and revelled in the fresh air that came in soft sighs from the distant blue hills, visiting her cheek like a

caress. Gazing on the mass of trees below her, all glorious with the first tints of autumn, at a distance, on an opposite slope, and under a large tree, with a sort of clearing round it, her eye was attracted by a large white stone, or heap of stones, and she fancied it might be a Druid's altar.

"It must be easy to find my way to it, if I follow that path," she thought, deceived as to the distance, by the valley which lay between.

So she started, following a path worn by rustic footsteps through the tufty uneven grass which grew luxuriantly under the delicious shade of the thick trees. She strolled leisurely along, stopping often to enjoy the effect of light and shade, to see the rich yellow sunbeams come quivering through the gently stirred leaves, and glance upon the smooth stems of the beech trees. Then she heard the distant refreshing music of a rivulet, chafing against stones, and presently she came to a brawling clear brown stream, hurrying over a small descent, raving round a large boulder or two, and making the big black stones on its margin wet and slimy; the tall slender trees springing from the banks nearly met over the waterfall, and just over it was a little foot bridge, consisting of a single plank, and a broken rail at one side. How intensely Madeline enjoyed all this beauty! Her heart sprang up with a feeling of joyous thankfulness. Everything must come right in a world where the love of the Great Creator was manifested by its exquisite decoration. The beauty, the freedom, the pure air, produced their natural effect—physical exhilaration; and Madeline, secure in the solitude, sang aloud in the joy of her heart.

The path now led up a hill still embowered in trees, though the increasing light beyond warned the explorer that she was coming near the end of the wood. Soon she reached a stile, and then she was in a bare stubble field, without any view of the object for which she sought. To that succeeded a piece of pasture, which, seeing it was tenanted by sundry horned creatures, she did not like to pass, so she turned to the right, where a less beaten track led into a meadow, then into a potato field. Still no sign of a house, or any one stirring about; then she came to another bifurcation of the path, and so through a gate into a little country lane, with hedgerows, and here and there a large tree. She was now a good deal fatigued; moreover, she feared it was late, and so, after trying to remember how she had turned at various places, she took what she imagined the direction of the Grange, and walked a considerable time, principally up hill, till an opening in the hedgerow showed her, rather to her dismay, that the hill side on which she had looked from the ruins was still before her, but the large white stone considerably behind. She was therefore going from, instead of towards her goal.

If she could see any one to ask her way. It was singular this loneliness, and she felt a little alarmed. The sun was low, evening would soon close in. What if Lady Templemore and her daughters returned before her! How that lady would sneer at a romantic ramble; and worse, it might suggest to her that Madeline was an enthusiast, and therefore unfit for the guidance of a gushing creature like Lady Agnes; and Madeline was especially anxious not to lose her appointment so long as she chose to hold it.

While she stood thus hesitating what next to do, a party of sportsmen came round a bend of the road. The first was a tall, a very tall, gentleman in a shooting dress; his broad chest and wide shoulders, rendered more marked by the diagonal strap of his powder-flask. He wore a felt wide-awake hat, bent much out of shape, and rather turned up at the side furthest from the sun; under it was a noble, aristocratic face, with large dark blue eyes, and a profusion of auburn brown beard and moustache. He was a stately, soldierly-looking man, embrowned by exercise or travel, with the free step and lordly carriage of one who had never known a master.

Madeline smiled to herself, and thought that in armour he might have sat for the portrait of one of the Norman chiefs who in olden time had so often held the fortresses of the Marches against overwhelming odds of Welsh barbarians. Though she only stole a sly glance as he approached her, she would have liked a portrait of him, to gaze at so much grace and strength united, such as she had never seen before.

The sportsman was followed by two men, both dressed somewhat like himself, and bearing guns—evidently gamekeepers—and a boy carrying a game-bag. As they approached, the principal personage gave Madeline a quick, searching glance. It was certainly very unusual to meet such a figure in a country lane. Her pretty dress, and scarf of black and white muslin, just sufficiently displayed the outlines of her softly-rounded figure, and a wide-brimmed grey straw hat showed the white throat and little pink ear peeping out of a mass of pale gold hair, gently waved from the parting to the ends, and gathered up into a coil at the back. The whole attitude, from the little grey-gloved hand holding up the folds of her dress from the dusty path, to the neat little boot peeping from beneath a snowy petticoat, had in it an indescribable grace—a sort of tender charm—by which no quick observer could have been uninfluenced, and certainly not the man who now looked at her so searchingly, yet rapidly.

Making an effort over herself, she stopped the attendant nearest her as he was passing, and flushing over a delicate pink, asked—

"Would you be so good as to direct me the nearest way to the Grange?"

Before the man could reply, the gentleman in front, who had overheard the question, turned back, and lifting his battered hat with courtly grace, said with a pleasant smile—

"You have indeed wandered far. It is a long way back; you must retrace your steps for about half a mile, and then turn down a lane on your right, which will lead to a farm-house; there they will direct you to a wood, through which you must pass."

"Ah, yes! I know. I came through it this evening. It will be very dark," she added, with a natural dislike to the loneliness, and glancing at the sinking sun seen through the break in the hedge-row.

"If," returned the gentleman, "you will let me accompany you to the farm, I will make the owner send one of his people across the wood with you, after which you will be in Lord Templemore's grounds."

"Thank you very much," said Madeline, most gratefully. "But perhaps were I to ask at the farm myself, they would send some one, and then I need not take you out of your way."

"It is little out of my way," replied the stranger, looking down into her eyes, and smiling genially, "and I fear our border Welsh-men are not so polite as they ought to be. You had better accept my escort." So saying he gave his gun to one of his attendants, adding, "You can go on to the Hall, Jenkins; say I shall be home half an hour after you."

He then placed himself beside Madeline, and they proceeded along the path by which she had just come. The gentleman's tone and manner was so perfectly well-bred and natural, so free from any affectation of gallantry, and withal tinged with something of an elder's authority, that Madeline felt thoroughly at ease with him; presently the gamekeepers turned down a lane on the left, and they were *tête-à-tête*.

There was no lack of conversation; perhaps for the first time Madeline was able to speak freely, and as she thought. How much she enjoyed it; she told her companion how she had been tempted to wander on in search of the white stone she had observed from the ruins, and asked if it was a Druid's altar. He said it was a heap of white stones, but no one know what brought them there; and as they had no meetings of the British Association in the neighbourhood, the mystery of its existence remained unsolved.

Then they spoke of many things, and the curious mixture of originality and tenderness in Madeline's observations often struck her escort, and induced him to steal observing looks under the broad-leafed hat, and into the large dark eyes upturned to him in the interest of discussion. At last they came to the turn he had described to Madeline, and soon the roof of the farm-house nest-

ling snugly in a hollow, came in view. You might have passed it a dozen times by the road, and not discovered it. Here a short pause occurring, the stranger suddenly said—

"Have I not the honor of speaking to one of the Ladies Grey Temple?"

"Oh, no!" replied Madeline, with a sweet, frank laugh, as though amused at the idea, "I am their governess."

"Well, I ought to have supposed they would have known the country better; you must be very tired, you had better come in, and rest for a few moments."

They had now reached a large farmstead, in which there appeared to be abundance of agricultural wealth, including dirt.

"Halloa! Mrs. Thomas, are you at home?" shouted Madeline's companion, at the open door, as no one answered his knock. His summons, however, was replied to by the appearance of a russet-faced dame in a snowy cap and blue bed-gown, showing a striped linsey petticoat. She looked both cross and surprised till her eyes fell on the speaker, and then she smiled a wintry smile, and dropped a succession of curtsies.

"Would his honour and the lady come inside. They were just coming home from folding the cows."

"This lady will rest for awhile, and then you must send some of your people with her through the Grange Wood to Lord Templemore's. She has lost her way, and is very tired. Thank you, Mrs. Thomas," he concluded, with kindly politeness; and making way for Madeline, they entered a large flagged kitchen, or living-room. A low red fire glowed upon the hearth, and over it hung a large black pot. There were settles at either side, and a large table, partly spread for supper.

The strange gentleman drew a three-legged stool forward, offering it to Madeline, who gladly sat down, while old Mrs. Thomas was profuse in her civilities.

"Would the lady have a drink of new milk and a slice of home-made bread?"

Madeline readily accepted the offer, for she felt faint. Her companion leant against the end of the large settle, holding his old felt hat. Madeline, feeling the kitchen warm, removed hers also, and sat at her ease, eating her bread, and smiling and talking as if the stranger had been an old friend, while the gleam of the red fire cast the ripples of her hair into wondrous light and shade. Suddenly the stranger exclaimed—

"I can see you across the wood myself, instead of waiting for this son of Mrs. Thomas."

"No, no!" replied Madeline, earnestly and frankly, "Lady Templemore would not, I feel, be pleased were I to permit you to come with me."

"Why?" he asked, with a smile. "Has she a higher opinion of country bumpkins than of a gentleman?"

"I cannot argue about it," replied Madeline; "I can only tell you what I instinctively feel. No; you must not come."

"That shall be as you decide, then," he returned, with grave politeness.

Just then Mrs. Thomas, who had been looking out for the return of her son, came in to announce he was at hand, and immediately after a stout elderly farmer entered. Louting low to Madeline's companion, he professed himself ready to take the lady across the wood.

"It be a lonsome dark place, sure!" he added.

"Well, the sooner we go the sooner you will be back to your supper, which I am truly sorry to disturb, but I dare not delay longer," said Madeline, rising. With gentle politeness she bid the ancient dame good evening, and re-assumed her hat.

The gentleman escorted her to the edge of the wood, and then took leave of her with evident reluctance.

"Good-bye, and thank you for all the help you have given me," said Madeline, holding out her hand frankly.

The stranger took and bowed over it with profound respect. "*Au revoir*," he said, "not good-bye, remember."

"Pooh!" said Madeline, with a smile, and so passed into the shadow of the wood, closely followed by the sturdy Thomas Thomas.

"Pray, who is that gentleman?" she asked, after exchanging a few sentences with her guide.

"Eh! don't you know the Colonel? Why he is Colonel Dudley Ashurst. He owns most of the land about here. He is my landlord. 'Twas his eldest brother as sold the Grange t'ould Mr. Grey, Lady Templemore's father. Eh! they're a grand proud lot, the Ashursts. I remember his father, and I remember himself a little boy. Lord, how he used to ride his pony through the ploughed fields—and all the mischief he used to do. But we've seen little of him since that day. He's mostly away. Ah! they are a great family."

Madeline made no reply. She wanted Thomas Thomas to hold his tongue. It seemed to freeze all the sunny sense of enjoyment that had filled her heart to have the immeasurable distance between herself and this courteous pleasant stranger thus thrust upon her. He was deferential to her because he was a gentleman; but what was there in common between a little friendless, penniless governess and the head of a grand proud family—yet what was that to her? She was a goose! So she rallied herself, and began to chat to Thomas Thomas about cows and sheep, and a thousand things, quite merrily, till Thomas thought her a rare

pleasant young lady, and that it was shorter than usual across the wood. So they reached the ruins where Thomas informed her Colonel Ashurst's estate ended and Lady Templemore's began. "This here old place belonged to his people long ago, it *is* said," concluded Thomas.

"Then I need not take you any further. I know my way quite well now, and am so much obliged to you for taking care of me."

Thomas Thomas made a leg, and an awkward speech about being glad to do the Colonel's bidding, and so departed.

Madeline ran hastily home, and to her infinite relief found she was in time; none of the party had returned, so she smoothed her hair, and made Susan, the school-room maid, get her some tea. Then she sat down to read—to get quite cool and composed before meeting the inquisitorial eye of Lady Templemore.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GRANGE had the reputation of being a pleasant house to stay at, in spite of the solidity of its mistress. This was principally owing to the tastes and tendencies of the master. For, according to the reversal of the usual order of things, in the case of Lord and Lady Templemore, the lighter and pleasanter details of life fell to the husband's share. And Lord Templemore was great in musical arrangements—a real genius in charades and small theatricals of all kinds; moreover, he organized a pic-nic admirably, and with eminent social talents was the life and soul of a party.

Lady Templemore, with her accustomed good sense, never interfered with the exercise of his natural abilities, as long as they kept within the limits of reasonable expense—and was quite ready to reap what benefit she could from the reputation his exertions gained for her house.

About a fortnight after Madeline's little adventure, an unusually large party was to assemble at the Grange. The sport was generally good, and that attracted sportsmen, who in their turn attracted fair ladies, who attracted lions and musicians of various degrees, to all of whom Lady Templemore was indulgent: the age of pure reason had not yet arrived, and in the mean time, such addenda were considered pleasant, if not essential, by the world in which her ladyship lived.

The note of preparation, however, scarcely reached the seclusion of Madeline's school-room. Indeed, Lady Templemore was particularly anxious that the excitable Lady Agnes should be kept as much from participation in the gay doings as possible—still, small rivulets of intelligence would trickle through those very porous vessels—the young ladies' maid, and the school-room maid. So they heard that nearly all the accommodation at the village inn was taken up by Lady Rawson's servants and horses; that my lord was nearly all day in the workshop (as a large room in the out-offices devoted to carpenter's work was called), with a painter from Greybridge—who made no end of a mess—doing up the scenes that had lain there since last autumn.

"Now, Miss Digby," cried Agnes, clapping her hands, "you see if we do not act charades, and all sorts of things; dear papa is always thinking of what is pleasant, and he will get me in to see them, I know."

The immediate effect, however, of the arrivals, was an increase of the school-room seclusion.

The governess and her pupils breakfasted alone, and only saw the guests at luncheon.

The first and second day, there were not more than a half a

dozen ladies present—a mother and two daughters, two young married ladies, and a large, stout, richly-dressed woman, with dark flashing eyes, and a high colour; large white hands covered with rings, and a sonorous voice, which she sedulously strove to moderate to the soft nothingness of those about her. She was a naturally jovial creature, though this was suppressed carefully, and ate her luncheon with a zest and enjoyment pleasant to behold.

She was the only member of the party who took much, or, indeed, any notice of Madeline or her pupils; and but for her the mid-day meal would have been dull, for the male portion being away in the stubble-fields, the conversation was languid, and Lady Templemore considered the entertaining of her guests more her husband's business than her own. So this black-eyed, jovial personage, had the field to herself. She seemed to have taken a fancy to Lady Agnes.

"When I was here last—let me see, two years ago—you were a little creature in short frocks, and now you are a young lady; mamma will be taking you to the drawing-room next season," she said.

"No, indeed, Lady Rawson," returned mamma, "nor for three seasons yet; Agnes is not quite fourteen."

"Oh! young ladies are very precocious now, much more than we used to be. Are you coming to drive with us, Lady Agnes, or are you to be of the riding party?"

"Neither, I am sorry to say," said Agnes, in a sad tone.

"What! you remain in durance vile with Miss—Miss—I do not know her name," and Lady Rawson looked keenly at Madeline, who had before attracted her attention.

"Digby," said Lady Agnes.

Lady Rawson's countenance changed slightly; but she continued almost without hesitation, "Miss Digby, then; though I do not fancy it very terrible durance," and she smiled and showed a splendid row of teeth.

"And where are we to drive to-day, Lady Templemore?"

"I thought of taking you round by Trevallon. There is a curious pile of stones there, said to be the burial-place of some Welsh chiefs, which is an object for a drive."

"Yes; anything to keep us out among the beautiful scenery you have down here. But how is it, the name of Trevallon seems familiar to me? Does it not belong to Dudley Ashurst?"

"Yes; almost all the land about here is his."

"Imagine that! And yet I am told he is terribly out at elbows. Where is he at present? He has been lost sight of for a long time."

"He was at Trevallon, a week ago. My son, who had a slight

acquaintance with him abroad, rode over there to see him, and Colonel Ashurst returned the visit in a day or two; but we were all unfortunately out."

"It is a long time since I saw Dudley Ashurst," said Lady Rawson, in a musing tone. "I should like to meet him again."

"We will try and persuade him to join our party while you are here."

"Yes, do, Lady Templemore," said the Honourable Mrs. Langley, a pretty blonde, who had been till now absorbed in the occupation of feeding her Italian greyhound. "He was introduced to me at the opera last spring, and then he never appeared again. How handsome he is—quite unlike the modern man."

"I hear he has plunged the estate into terrible difficulties," observed Mrs. Bouverie Griffiths, the wife of a neighbouring magnate, who had come with a couple of daughters to pay a return visit to Lady Templemore. "But, I presume that they are only temporary, for when his grandfather, old Lord Hexham, dies, he will come in for the title and estates."

"The title—yes!" cried Lady Rawson; "but a very small property is attached to it. The rest of his great wealth is altogether at Lord Hexham's disposal, and the turn of a straw might make Colonel Ashurst the most miserable of creatures—a poor peer."

"I thought Lord Hexham was very fond of his grandson," said Mrs. Griffiths.

"Yes, I have heard so; but everyone knows he is the most heartless, flinty, whimsical old man in England, with the most charming exterior," returned Lady Rawson.

Here Lady Chefferil, a silent, irreproachable woman, who seldom troubled herself about anything, observed: "I think the horses are at the door, so perhaps we had better dress," whereupon everyone rose, and the conversation ceased.

"Do, mamma, please! let me go with you," whispered Lady Agnes, pressing to her mother's side.

"Nonsense!" was the reply, sternly said; "you may ride when Kate and Mary Bloomfield join us, who are about your own age; but till then stay with Miss Digby."

"That was what mamma said when I asked leave," cried Lady Agnes, when alone with Madeline, "and I will stay with you, dear Miss Digby. I think you would not say 'No,' to me if *you* were my mother," and she threw herself, half crying, into Madeline's arms.

Madeline held her lovingly to her heart, which yearned for the fair impetuous young thing, in whom she traced so much of her own tender nature, her own intense love of enjoyment, and beauty, and sunshine; but not her strength.

"Were I your mother, dear, dear child, I would try to say 'No,' when I thought it right, though it would be hard, I confess.'

"But mamma likes to say 'No.'"

"Hush! Lady Agnes; you do not think so, really."

It was an unusually hard task to Madeline to play the part of preceptress that day, the conversation at luncheon had so filled her heart with varied painful thoughts. She had by a strong effort of will and common sense nearly banished the memory of her walk with Dudley Ashurst.

She would scarce have been a true woman such as I have endeavoured to show her, with her peculiar instincts and tendencies, not to mark such an event with a white stone; not to dwell long and regretfully on their short conversation; but she was no weakling to let imagination master her, so finding her whole being becoming one recollection, she set herself steadily to suppress it, and thought she had succeeded.

The morning after her little adventure she had told it at breakfast, in precisely the right tone of candour, and Lady Templemore made no observation, save that "Bracklyn must call upon Colonel Ashurst when he returned," and then no more was said by any one till this day. Then she was grieved and mortified to think how bitter was the pang inflicted by the gossip at luncheon.

Why was it that the evil magician circumstance had so hurled her from her right, her natural station, that between her and Dudley Ashurst and his like "there was a great gulf fixed?" She had heard much from Madame de Fontarce of her father's aristocratic birth, and she felt that nature had stamped her with the hall-mark of nobility. She could hold her place with the finest ladies she had ever met; she felt there was not on earth a presence before which she would be abashed, gentle though she might be, yet she was nothing! The mere fact of Colonel Ashurst being seen with her would imply impropriety, because of the difference of their station.

How was it that the mere fault of poverty neutralised all good gifts? Oh! what an inextricable confusion was life! Where was the clue to its meshes? Where was justice and nobility of heart, and a true touchstone by which to test merit? Ah! poor wandering child, nearly two thousand years ago the solemn question, "What is truth?" was put to the only One who on this earth could have replied; and the questioner, as though hopeless of a solution, "went out" without waiting an answer! And yet to hearts such as Madeline's more of truth is perhaps revealed than is given to the "wise and prudent." But this Dudley Ashurst, the descendant of Norman chiefs, this future peer of England, he it was of all the men (not many 'tis true) she had ever met with whom she felt most at ease, most on an equality, excepting for

the natural and gracious degree of reverence true woman feels for true man.

And for herself, what could she do to relieve her spirit, to raise her hopes for the future? To her, sorrow and unavailing regret was insupportable; she must kill it, or it would kill her. Against social distinctions she could do nothing; too well had she been schooled to regard them as immutable; but should they, should anything, destroy the glorious gift of life stretching out before her, at little more than nineteen? No! she had will enough to guide her own future, and more than ever her mind turned to the stage. There a woman could achieve a position; not certainly so solid, so quietly important, as the head of a family, like Lady Templemore; but more brilliant, and, oh! better still, due to herself alone. Then, perhaps, when she roused the souls of some vast audience, and sent winged words, fraught with tenderness or daring, thrilling into a thousand hearts, and for the moment made them all her own, perhaps Dudley Ashurst might be there, and think, "There *is* something in life beyond this hour's rank and station, powdered heads, red tape, ribbons, and rubbish." However, Madeline soon toned herself down from this flight. The effervescence evaporated, but left a residuum of determination that by the time her year at Lady Templemore's was done, she would seek her old singing-master, and consult him about her future proceedings.

The evening of this day was almost a failure, to Lord Templemore's disgust. A singing-man had arrived from London—a pet with the world of fashionable ladies—a universal genius, very much spoiled and *exigeant*. But unfortunately, Mrs. Meadows, a singing and playing woman, who had the *entrée* of what is termed the "best society" in consequence, despite uncertain antecedents, and the suspicion of a mythical husband, had telegraphed that she had a sore throat and must not travel. The "genius" cursed the sore throat in his heart, and was undone—he was near-sighted, and could not play his own accompaniments. Suddenly Lord Templemore bethought him, "There was that little syren, Miss Digby, wasting her sweetness in the school-room; she could probably supply the 'missing link' in the chain of harmony." So Miss Digby was peremptorily summoned. She was in her ordinary dress of black silk, very neat and becoming, yet unfit to appear in so brilliant a company. However, she did not hesitate. Something of exaltation from her mid-day musings still upheld her. Something of a golden mist from the strong light of inner holy reality hung round her, and hid difficulty and doubt for awhile. So when the message was brought, she laid down the work she had taken up, kissed Lady Agnes, and followed the messenger without hesitation.

She entered the music-room by a side-door, and so avoided passing through the large drawing-room. She had never seen these apartments lit up and uncovered before, and, unaccustomed as she was to such scenes, she was struck and delighted.

"Well, you really are a good girl to come at once," said Lord Templemore, pleased with her ready obedience, and kindly giving her his arm. "Here, Mr. Fitzharris, here is a substitute for Mrs. Meadows. I am not sure what she can do, but I am sure she will do her best."

The "genius" turned the glare of an eye-glass and a distorted eye full upon her, then letting that instrument of torture fall, exclaimed, in a patronising tone, "Your lordship is a true magician, to conjure up so fair a substitute at a moment's notice. If you could have remembered your powers a little sooner, I should have enjoyed my dinner more."

"What do you wish me to do?" asked Madeline, simply.

When it was explained, she professed herself ready to do her best, but warned Mr. Fitzharris that she had never played an accompaniment before. However, the "genius" soon set her to work, and she succeeded beyond her own hopes. She had a quick, true ear, and taste, and had no thought beyond the music, no idea of display, which is ruin to an accompanist.

Then Mr. Fitzharris asked her to try a duet; and as he had one or two she had studied with G——, she readily undertook them, really enjoying the performance, to the forgetfulness of company, "toilette," all but the occupation, and yet she was perfectly content to be in the background. So Mr. Fitzharris was charmed with her, and Lord Templemore was charmed, and the lords and ladies who were accustomed to have their ears tickled were charmed, and the little governess had quite a success.

"You know it is all nonsense," said Lord Templemore to his wife with unusual spirit, "we cannot have such an acquisition as Miss Digby shut up in the school-room; let her and poor Agnes come in every evening, it will do Agnes good." So the matter was settled. But Madeline, though she had enjoyed the music greatly, stole away a little wearied, and cried herself to sleep.

Music being all-important in Lord Templemore's mind at that moment, Madeline soon found the seclusion of the school-room broken in upon. My lord wished her to practice this or that duet with Mr. Fitzharris; and my lady was too much occupied with her multifarious duties and accounts, both considerably increased at such a time, to interfere.

Mr. Fitzharris was very friendly and patronising to Madeline—she was so earnest in her efforts to learn the parts assigned to her, so sincere in her admiration of "Little Fitz" (as he was familiarly called), his magnificent voice and finished style—she had so little

self-conceit to clash against his—that she soon became a first favourite. Mr. Fitzharris was an old young man, who for years had been a pet with dowagers of rank and musical pretensions. Who he was, and where he came from, no one knew, and no one asked. It was sufficient that he wore good clothes, and sung as well as any professor, for the small remuneration of a place at your table occasionally, and the *entrée* of your house. He was also an artist in a small way, and wrote verses. He had even published a volume of "Fugitives Pieces," inspired, Lord Templemore said, "by the grace of God"—a piece of witty blasphemy, suggested, it is to be feared, by a legal document familiar to Irish imaginations. He was a small, thin man, with a great deal of hair both on head and face, and large, innocent-looking, near-sighted eyes. He was a whimsical, uncertain, ill-tempered little man; yet, though he never went out shooting with the other men, or smoked in the stable, but preferred the ladies' morning-room—where he drew patterns, and recited his own and other people's poetry—there was still a bit of manhood in him. He could discern beauty or genius, however clouded by circumstance; and he would venture to announce such a discovery, and stand by it too; and whatever he might be to women, he never cringed to men. No one knew how he lived—scarcely where; he was suspected of extreme poverty, yet he did not borrow, at least not from the class of people to be met with at Lady Templemore's; but it was whispered he had another class of acquaintances, further west still—and also north—rich City families, whose portraits he drew—the husbands' as presents to the wives—wives' as mementos for the husbands, and "received his reward," and that not grudgingly. Yet, though courted and petted, he was sometimes a very melancholy little man; common sense, no doubt, occasionally (when he was bilious, or short of cab-hire) suggested that there was but his voice and youth between him and the workhouse.

Nevertheless, he was useful to Madeline at this time, for he was a thorough musician, so they became great friends; and every evening when the gentlemen came up from dinner, he used literally to "stand by" the little governess.

However, he was not long alone in this. Lord Bracklyn used to come and utter three or four sentences, and then stand staring at her; and so used Captain Harris of the Guards, and young Mr. Bouverie Griffiths. But what she preferred to them all, Lady Rawson frequently came into the music-room, and spoke very kindly to Madeline. No one was ever anything but polite to her. The shocking rudeness which, according to popular report, is lavished on young ladies in her position, exists, I suspect, very much in the imagination of the sufferers. At stray times she was, perhaps unavoidably, made to feel the difference and distance be

tween her and the free-born women of rank with whom she was temporarily associated.

Lady Rawson, too, used sometimes to be admitted to the schoolroom, and there and everywhere she was a great favourite, except with "little Fitz," who hated her for some reason—probably she rubbed him the wrong way too often, for Lady Rawson's refinement was barely skin deep.

"She is very good-natured," said Madeline, one morning, in reply to a sneering remark of his, after she had left the room.

"Do you think so? That is because she patronises you; were I in your place I would not be patronised."

"I am not so sure of that," returned Madeline, laughing. "You patronise me yourself, and I assure you it is not disagreeable."

"I patronise you, Miss Digby?" he repeated indignantly. "How can you accuse me of such bad taste?"

"I do not think it is bad taste; you are older than I am, you have a higher position, and, above all, you are my superior in knowledge. No; your patronage is quite natural."

"You are a strange girl, Miss Digby."

"And Lady Rawson's, too, though I do not recognise her right in the same degree. I fancy I have as much knowledge as she has—except, perhaps, knowledge of the world."

"Ah! she beats you there, Miss Digby, and is wiser than you," exclaimed Fitz, bitterly. "She knows how to succeed, at any rate. Do you know her history?"

"No, how could I?"

"Well, she was an actress long ago; not a high-class actress by any means, but handsome, in the fine animal style, and she managed, no matter how, to persuade a very wealthy stockbroker to marry her. He very prudently died, just when he had made a great hit in Brazilian bonds, or Turkish loans, or some such thing, and before he had time to lose the result in Pontgiband shares, or anything else. He left his widow sole legatee. Just after that Sir William Rawson, a thorough-going politician, was horribly hard up, a general election was pending, so he married her, and they got on apparently very well. She made his house pleasant—it was quite a private *rendezvous* for his party, till one fine morning he died of cholera. So she is a second time a widow, and I fancy will rest upon her laurels. She has a splendid house, and affects art and music, and a thousand things of which she knows nothing—a dangerous woman, Miss Digby."

"She was an actress," said Madeline, thoughtfully.

"Yes, it is universally known."

"Yet she seems much sought after and respected."

"She is rich," said "little Fitz," with bitter emphasis. "You are too young yet, Miss Digby, to know the extent to which the golden calf is worshipped."

The next day there was to be a large addition at dinner to the party staying in the house. Some of the church dignitaries from Greybridge, and one or two superior officers of a regiment quartered at a manufacturing town twenty miles off, yet brought within dinner range by the railroad. The visitors, too, were changed; Mrs. and the Misses Bouverie Griffiths had gone, and were replaced by a Scotch marchioness, with a couple of red-haired and desperately lively daughters, who broke up the still and rather dull decorum which Lady Templemore managed to preserve, notwithstanding her lord's efforts to the contrary. These young ladies insisted on carrying off Mr. Fitzharris to ride, in spite of his efforts at resistance. So Madeline and Lady Agnes had a quiet morning to themselves, in the course of which Madeline received the following letter. She read it with mixed feelings.

"Ashley Villas,
"September 11th.

"MY DEAREST MADELINE,

"You must think me very negligent not to have answered your dear letter sooner. Believe me, it was not want of interest or decrease of friendship that kept me silent, and I am truly rejoiced to find you are so happy and comfortable. It is a great advantage to be in a family such as you describe, and your life must be quite different from what mine was at the Vicarage. I am spending a few days with my mother, as we have left Liverpool, Mr. Downing having obtained a much better situation than he had there. He is appointed overseer to some great ironworks at Stapleton, where we shall have a pretty cottage all to ourselves. I fancy it must be somewhere near you, if so you must come and stay with us. I am sure you would be so pleased with Arthur. He, too, wishes to know you. I was vexed to hear about Sam. I always knew he admired you, but I also knew you would not have him. My dear mother is still a little sore about it, but loves you very much. I have a great deal to do just now buying furniture, as we are going to furnish our cottage principally from London. Excuse a short letter, and pray write soon to me. My mother's kind love, and Mr. Downing's compliments.

"I am, dearest Madeline.
"Your ever attached,
"JESSIE DOWNING."

Madeline thought she liked the old name best. She did not fancy Mr. Downing, and pictured rather a snobbish person in her mind's eye.

However, Jessie was satisfied, and Madeline most earnestly hoped she was happy, "at least she has a good chance of it, and

will make a charming home for her husband. Home! What a delicious word!" and involuntarily Madeline thought of her own peculiarities, which forbid her hoping for such a haven. The men of her own position she could not bear. Life with any she had seen was simply insupportable, while those who would have suited her were far above, out of her reach.

"I must find my happiness in other things," she thought; "I must wed myself to art." Thus thinking, she sat down and wrote a cordial and loving letter to her friend.

CHAPTER XVII.

As there was so large a gathering on this evening, Madeline thought it right to make more of a toilette than her usual high clear white muslin and black ribbons. She therefore put on an evening dress of grey silk, with a good deal of delicate black lace, and a jet cross to a black velvet ribbon on her neck. Her hair was also fastened back with a long black lace lappet, which showed exquisitely against its pale gold lustre. She had an undoubted *air noble* thus attired. The snowy sloping shoulders, the proudly set-on head, the indescribable distinction of her bearing, contrasted with the softness of her expression, made up a whole thoroughly deserving Madame de Fontarce's term—*séduisante.* She was with her pupils in the drawing-room when the ladies came in from dinner. Lady Templemore seemed pleased at something, and relaxed her usual gravity a little; she spoke pleasantly to Madeline, and said she feared she had been much interrupted of late. "It will not last long, however," she added; and then she introduced Madeline to a kindly old lady with grey hair—quite the type of a venerable English lady—she was the wife of a dean—and Madeline was charmed to talk to her.

Then Mr. Fitzharris came in as usual first, but not in his usual spirits, moreover, he walked stiffly, and seemed anxious to avoid the Ladies Flora and Catherine MacTaggert; soon, however, he drew Madeline to the music-room, and here they were followed by Lord Bracklyn, with a request from Lady Rawson that Miss Digby would sing an Irish melody, or something with English words.

"I can quite understand that Italian is Greek to her ladyship," said "little Fitz," who was in an awful humour, "and you may tell her so from me."

"Hush, hush!" put in Madeline, laughing; "you had better say we were going to sing '*La ci darem*' at Lord Templemore's

desire, afterwards I shall be most happy to sing anything she likes."

The piano stood at one side of the music-room, clear of the wall, and a wide doorway, shaded by *portières*, was on Madeline's right as she sat at the piano. As Lord Bracklyn left to deliver Madeline's message, she turned her head to see if Lady Rawson was in the room, and there, standing in the doorway, holding a cup of coffee, and leaning against the side of the doorway, was Colonel Dudley Ashurst, looking supremely the man of rank, and the *preux chevalier*. He was talking with a stout, red-faced, country-looking gentleman, and did not even glance round.

Madeline's heart, in spite of the severe schooling she had given herself, leaped up, and then beat wildly for a few minutes; her voice at first was tremulous, so that "little Fitz" thought that his cup of annoyance was about to be filled by the failure of his *prima donna*. But soon the reaction set in; a sense of power, of exhilaration, poured its magic into Madeline's spirit, and she sang as she never sang before. Unreasonable, absurd, conceited, improbable, as she told herself it was, she felt that she had drawn him there.

"Look, Miss Digby," said "little Fitz," "there's the hero of the evening standing in the doorway—that long man. What an extraordinary thing popularity, or rather renown, is, for Colonel Ashurst is scarcely popular. He is nothing on earth but a retired cavalry colonel, a half-broken-down squire, with a poor earldom in prospect, and yet you would think he had conferred the greatest honour on every one; first, by coming to dine here, and then by asking all the men over to shoot his grounds to-morrow; that comes of keeping himself to himself; even in London he is made a great fuss about in a certain set; and yet he has been a horrid scamp."

Here Lady Rawson came through the doorway, and stopped to speak to Colonel Ashurst, who seemed to attend to her most politely, but not, Madeline fancied, with the sort of chivalrous deference with which he had treated herself. He did not leave his position when her ladyship moved on, nor did he send a single glance towards Madeline; yet how glad she was that "little Fitz" was silent. It seemed such blasphemy to apply the term "horrid scamp" to that stately being, who looked the "ideal lord of the creation." Then Madeline smiled, and told herself that she was a dreamy idiot, and so spoke pleasantly with Lady Rawson for a few minutes; then, at her ladyship's request, sang that most lovely melody, "Has sorrow thy young days shaded." Madeline's voice, though clear and high, had in it something of the dusky richness of the contralto, and these old airs were very dear to her; so she threw her whole soul into her song, that was

a mode of speech of which none could deprive her. There was a murmur of approbation when she had finished, not so loud, of course, as if Lady Flora, or the Honourable Mrs. Langley, or Lady Rawson had sung, though it would scarcely have been well-bred to sing so dramatically, and she was about to rise, when a deep but pleasant voice said, close to her ear, "You sing well—you sing just as I imagined you would."

Madeline kept very quiet, she knew he would come, and was hardly startled, she did not even turn her head, but replied without looking: "How did you form the idea that I sang at all?" A proceeding that showed Dudley Ashurst two things: first, that his voice was well remembered; and second, that already there was a silent understanding between them.

"Your voice," he said, "told me you must sing; and did you reach home in time to avoid Lady Templemore's wrath?—that you reached it safely I ascertained."

"Yes; I was in excellent time—but I shall never lose myself again—I shall not again venture to explore alone."

"It would be better with a companion, certainly—but, Miss Digby, you sing most dramatically."

"Do you think so? do you really think so?" said Madeline, turning round, and meeting his eyes fully, in her earnestness; how intensely they were fixed on her, and yet tenderly, though as they met hers the expression changed.

"I do, indeed," he said, offering his arm to lead her to a seat; "but my opinion is not of much value on such a subject."

"You must have seen a great deal," replied Madeline; "enough to enable you to judge."

"Why are you so curious as to your own powers?" asked Colonel Ashurst, with his peculiar smile, half-admiring, half-indulgent.

"Because," she returned, indescribably attracted to confide in him, and feeling a strange equality that no one else seemed to experience, "I should like to adopt the drama as a profession."

"Do not think of it—it is a miserable *métier* unless you meet with extraordinary success, and that falls to the lot of few."

"Then my dramatic powers are not, you think, first-rate?"

"I cannot possibly say; but apart from success, there is much in a theatrical career to distress a woman like you." These last words implied a wondrous and tender respect, that sent the light dancing into Madeline's dark eyes, and made the soft dimples come round her mouth.

"I must not be over-fastidious," she said, brightly, "I have myself only to depend on, and I fancy we can make our own position to a certain degree, and influence our surroundings too."

"You speak bravely. Is the world really before you where to choose?"

"Yes," replied Madeline, laughing; "only in spite of the wide sounding range, the choice is limited."

Colonel Ashurst was silent. He thought of the strange destiny which sent this delicate, refined girl to fight the battle of life alone; and yet she seemed so joyous and fearless.

"There is something in you that must bring success, I imagine," he said, after a pause.

"I hope you will prove a true prophet."

Here Mr. Fitzharris came to say he wanted Madeline to accompany him in a French song, and so the conversation was broken up. Then the ladies MacTaggert insisted on dancing, and Madeline was pinned to the piano for the rest of the evening. Twice, however, Colonel Ashurst came and spent a few minutes by her side. Though still a young man—not more than five or six and thirty—he assumed a little the tone of an elder with Madeline, and, with a courteous, kindly frankness, asked her many questions of her former life. So, before the guests departed, he had, without seeming to bestow anything beyond common attention, learned the outline of her life. There was something very fresh to him in the species of serene confidence shown by the little governess. It was so different from the way in which society in general treated him. Yet there was no shadow of freedom in it. It was a natural expression of the feeling—"We understood each other." She was quite at ease with this "lord of the soil"—this marked man of London society. And though she noticed how frequently and steadily his eyes seemed to fix themselves on hers, it scarce embarrassed her. Nay, she looked frankly and fearlessly at him in return, studying with delight so new a specimen of mankind.

After leaning for a few minutes on the piano, when he last visited the music-room, Colonel Ashurst said suddenly, "I leave almost immediately, so will say good-night now."

"Good-night, then," replied Madeline; "and remember you will have to take a box at my benefit one of these days."

"Time will show," he returned. "For the present, good-bye; but, remember, I will see you again."

Madeline was in the midst of a complicated passage meant to inspire the "*en avant deux*" with additional spirit; she could not, therefore, take her hands from the piano, or even speak, but only smiled archly, and slightly elevated her eyebrows with an expression which said as distinctly as words, "*cui bono!*" Dudley Ashurst paused for an instant, and then disappeared.

The feelings with which Madeline reflected on this delightful evening were altogether new and strange. But the prevailing one was a sense of exultation. She was not altogether wrong, then, in her estimate of herself when a man like Dudley Ashurst took

the trouble to seek her out and converse with her. She felt she was in thought and feeling not unequal with him; and the curious pride which in her took the form of courage, but which was as far above vanity as the heavens are above the earth, led her to rush fearlessly into the dangerous friendship he seemed to offer.

"Yes, I am not altogether insignificant, not entirely unworthy the notice of those born to rule," she thought. Then she contrasted her new friend with all she had ever met before. What an immeasurable distance lay between him and Sam Moorcroft, and Mr. John Redman, and even Lord Templemore, well bred and pleasant as he was! *Le père* Duseautoir, indeed, was a type apart, but in his own way could bear comparison with any one.

To do Madeline justice, she felt no vulgar triumph in her personal attractions. She did not credit herself with any beauty, and thought it was her mind alone that attracted Colonel Ashurst. Life bore a new aspect, and in her own estimation Madeline filled a different place in it after this memorable evening. Yet was there no warning in her own heart against the master passion which had taken root in it? She little dreamed the Rubicon she had passed—even the brook which separates girlhood from womanhood. She knew it not. She slept and was happy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COLONEL DUDLEY ASHURST dined again at the Grange. On this occasion the party was smaller. Still he contrived with exquisite tact to secure a good deal of conversation with Madeline without drawing on her any invidious notice; and on reflecting over these delightful moments, Madeline smiled with surprise to think what a tone of easy confidence had sprung up between them, posed as they were at almost opposite ends of the social chain. On this second occasion Lady Agnes Grey Temple was much with her governess, and Colonel Ashurst bestowed a great deal of notice on the bright, fragile girl. More than once he remarked on the species of likeness between Madeline and her pupil.

"I do not wonder at your being a favourite at Lord Templemore's," he said. "If I had a daughter, I should love all who were like her. I am not so sure I should feel the same for a son. Young men are such cubs; are they not, Miss Digby?"

"A great many, certainly."

"And do you never ride out, or go beyond the precincts of the school-room?" he asked, a little before he bid her good-night.

"Very seldom," returned Madeline. "In spite of Lady Tem-

plemore's efforts, Lady Agnes is so frequently taken away for picnics, or to ride, that I have no necessity to go out. Indeed, I never venture further than the ruins; but they are, I believe, on your territory."

"Yes, you are a trespasser; and if I catch you there I will impound you. But there is a charming view from the old castle. I suppose it is a favourite haunt of yours?"

"I frequently stroll there," returned Madeline; "and long to sketch it, but cannot."

There was much talk that evening of a theatrical entertainment and ball to the county, which was to close the autumnal festivities of the Grange. It was to take place at the beginning of the next week, and every one was gradually absorbed in the preparation. Madeline was prompter and hearer in general of the ladies' parts, though none was assigned to her—much to Mr. Fitzharris's disgust—as the piece decided on was a musical sentimental comedy; but there were too many aspirants for dramatic honours of rank and position to leave any place for one who had only ability. Nevertheless, Madeline enjoyed it all. She would certainly have liked to act herself; but, failing that, to share in the preparations was the next best thing.

A few days before the great event came off, the company at the Grange started on a picnic excursion to see some famous slate quarries, about twenty miles distant, in the next Welsh county. In these morning parties Lady Agnes was now generally included, especially since the arrival of one of the dignitaries of the neighbouring cathedral, with two young daughters, for a few days. Madeline was, therefore, as she thought, left quite alone; and, after her early dinner, resolved to stroll up to the old castle, and take her work, in order to enjoy a glorious autumnal afternoon in the open air. She had, however, scarcely issued from the shadow of the house, intending to cross a small flower garden, and enter the plantations beyond, that being the most direct path to the ruins, when Lady Rawson's smart French maid came running rapidly after her—her ribbons fluttering on the breeze—with a thousand compliments on the part of Miladi, and would Miss Digby return for a few moments before she proceeded on her walk. Madeline, much surprised, of course, complied, and found Lady Rawson in her dressing-room, which overlooked the garden. She was in the act of locking her writing-case, and numerous freshly sealed letters lay beside it.

"Many apologies for my scant ceremony," she said, with her frank though rather bold smile; "but having been prevented from joining the party this morning by a wretched headache, I think a little stroll would do me a great deal of good. Will you allow me to accompany you?"

"I shall be delighted," returned Madeline, who had always found Lady Rawson kindly and agreeable.

"I shall not keep you a moment," said Lady Rawson. "Here, Fanchette, bring me a hat and jacket;" and in a few minutes they were ready. "I am glad to have a quiet stroll for once," said Lady Rawson, as they sallied forth. "There is always so much to see at a distance, that I have seen nothing of the home beauties. Let us go up to those effective ruins, and sentimentalise among them."

"By all means," returned Madeline. "It is a charming walk—I was on my way there when you stopped me."

"Indeed," said Lady Rawson in a peculiar tone; there was a little surprise, a little that was interrogative in it; but it scarce struck Madeline's ear, so they walked on chatting pleasantly. Lady Rawson was lively and observant, and not very cautious in her strictures on people and things. Madeline listened, throwing in a word or two here and there.

"I leave to-morrow," said her companion, rather abruptly, just as they reached a little wicket gate, which opened from Lady Templemore's grounds into the immediate *entourage* of the ruins; they paused here, for the ascent had been steep.

"Indeed," replied Madeline, "I did not know it before, and I am very sorry to know it now."

"I thank you, Miss Digby, I think you are; and you are right, I am perhaps the most friendly acquaintance you have here, and when you leave this place, for I see the spell of restlessness is on you, come and call upon me, there is my card," and she took one from a dainty ornamental note-case. "I might be useful to you in some way."

"How very good of you," cried Madeline. "I consider myself fortunate to have attracted your attention; but why do you think I shall leave Lady Templemore?"

"Because—I do not know," laughed Lady Rawson, "I feel it, rather than reason about it. Come, now confess you have made up your mind to leave before very long."

"I have no settled plan," returned Madeline, smiling.

"No, I can understand that, yet you are sure to leave, you are not the woman to be content with the monotony of the schoolroom. Nevertheless, think well before you leave the shelter of a home like this," she paused abruptly and Madeline kept silence, expecting her to resume; so she did, in a moment, but it was with a hearty laugh.

"How delighted 'little Fitz' will be when I am gone; I am a very skeleton at the feast to him; though a comfortable specimen of a skeleton, am I not, Miss Digby?"

"Why should he dislike you?" asked Madeline. "I really cannot imagine any one disliking you."

"Then you must have a very indifferent opinion of me, my dear girl! If you haven't enough in you to attract the dislike of some, there is very little. Fitz, however, dislikes me because long ago I ventured to give him a friend's advice. I was more Quixotic in those days, and ready to interest myself in people who thanked me very little; well, I advised him either to turn his voice to account and make money of it, or to cut his fine ac quaintances and get a clerkship somewhere—to do anything, in short, by which he could make and save money, rather than fritter away life, and find himself in his old days with no refuge but the workhouse. People are seldom grateful to those who amuse them after they are out of sight, but 'little Fitz' was in the height of his prosperity, poor little bird! so he was very much disgusted, and hates me accordingly. Oh! how weak men are! What will become of him in the 'winter of his discontent?'"

"Yes," sighed Madeline,

> "Ayante chanté tout l'été,
> Il se trouvera fort dépourvu
> Quand la bise sera venue."

"Just so; now Miss Digby, I wonder if I speak to *you* as a friend will you forthwith refuse to profit by my superior wisdom —no, experience—and hate me?"

They had been ascending to the highest part of the old keep while Lady Rawson spoke, and Madeline had just began to assure her that whatever effect her advice might have she would take it in good part, when the impulsive would-be woman of fashion, who was almost too honest for her *rôle*, interrupted her by exclamations of delight at the splendid view which suddenly opened beneath them—at their feet a sea of foliage, below a richly cultivated wooded valley, rising first into gentle swelling undulation, studded with farm-houses and hedge-rows, patches of woodland, and rugged rough grey rocks beyond, then sweeping up into distant blue mountains, with many a magic effect of light and shade.

"This is a delightful spot to sit and work, or sit and gaze rather," said her ladyship, "and a little further round that fragment of wall it must be better still."

As she spoke, a tall figure in a shooting-dress, with a portfolio under his arm, walked leisurely round the angle which she indicated, and Colonel Ashurst, raising his hat, addressed them. Madeline, in spite of her natural self-command, flushed all over for an instant at this most unexpected *rencontre*. But Dudley Ashurst did not notice her beyond what mere politeness required, entering into a lively conversation with Lady Rawson, and doing the honours of the ruins with frank courtesy.

"How is it you were not of the pic-nic party?" asked Lady Rawson, when they had seated themselves on a bench which was placed in commanding position.

"I scarcely know; I am growing old for these innocent amusements," he replied, laughing. "I am not sure I was asked."

"At any rate you preferred sketching here alone," said Lady Rawson, with some significance, and glancing at his portfolio.

"I did," he returned, looking straight into her eyes, a look of hauteur glancing across his proud face, as though he would say, "Pry into my affairs if you dare." Lady Rawson changed the conversation, and soon after vowed she was longing for a cup of tea, so rose to return to the Grange, Colonel Ashurst accompanied them to the wicket, and there said, "good-bye," declaring his intention of returning to sketch.

Madeline and her companion walked for a short time silently through the quiet fragrant plantation, when Lady Rawson suddenly broke out, "Sketching indeed! a different sort of art, I imagine!"

"How?" asked Madeline bewildered.

"Miss Digby, I asked you just now if I might venture to speak to you as a friend," returned Lady Rawson; "I repeat the question."

"If you will be so good, I shall be grateful for your kind intention at all events."

"But you do not undertake to follow my advice, eh? No matter; I will advise you for all that, and the advice can be put into a short compass. Beware of Dudley Ashurst!"

Madeline started, and replied simply, "Why?" her composure quite unshaken.

"Because you have had the misfortune to attract him; he is a most dangerous man!"

"I think you must be mistaken," replied Madeline, still keeping herself calm by a strong effort of her will. "I cannot remember any indication of my having attracted Colonel Ashurst."

"But I know better. I have noticed how he stealthily sought you out on both occasions of his dining at the Grange. And now, do you believe he came to sketch these ruins? Pooh! he came to meet you—no, you need not look so indignant; I acquit you of knowing anything of it. I thought you did at first, when I sent Fanchette after you. But you were so ready to accompany me to the castle, I saw your stroll there had no special object. My dear girl, the fancy of such a man can only do you harm. I am not a stuffy, straight-laced woman, and I grant that a few years of brilliant life with Dudley Ashurst would be a charming exchange for the monotony of the school-room; but remember, what would come after! Scarce any man of his rank would think of *marry-*

any you, and certainly *he* is not the exception. I don't say you are not to amuse yourself with him, and then turn him off. If you were only strong enough, I should be charmed to see you play that game. But you are not. No woman at your age is, because they are still capable of belief. When you have seen and known as much of men as I have, you will despise them as much as I do; they are such poor creatures, my dear!"

"Lady Rawson," returned Madeline, deeply stirred in the inner depths of her proud nature, "you have told me bitter truth; but I know it is truth. I know that men like Colonel Ashurst would never dream of wedding a woman unpossessed of any material advantage, and yet, I confess, all men of a lower stamp seem to me revolting."

"Just as I thought! That's the misfortune of having tastes and tendencies above your station. You might marry comfortably in it—a nice curate, now, some of them are very gentleman-like men."

"Thank you," returned Madeline, laughing, in spite of a pang that shivered through her, "I presume you have some article on hand that might suit. You spoke exactly as the people at Shoolbred's do when you ask for French merino, and they assure you they have Coburg at twenty shillings less that will answer the purpose just as well."

Lady Rawson looked at Madeline—at the dark light in her eyes, and the playful smile that contradicted it on her lip.

"You have a bold spirit, my dear—a proper kind of spirit. There are few men I would fear for you; but I do fear Dudley Ashurst."

"Well, Lady Rawson, at all events you have acted a friend's part in putting me on my guard; but in all sincerity I do not believe Colonel Ashurst would take any trouble about me."

"Well, well, I think you are speaking sincerely. Time will show. If I prove right, remember my warning. Society punishes *avowed* breakers of her laws unpityingly."

Madeline was silent, and Lady Rawson, changing the subject, talked on cheerfully till they reached the house. Then Madeline, rousing herself, asked her ladyship if she would condescend to take tea in the school-room, to which proposition she gladly assented; and Madeline exerted herself to amuse and entertain her, feeling surprised herself at her own powers. Never before had she exerted them in the same way; but she wished to produce two impressions on her guest: first, that her honest but unpalatable advice had been well received; secondly, that no weakness for Colonel Ashurst, nor galled pride, nor wounded tenderness, lurked treacherously in her heart to lower her spirit, or prevent her free use of the abilities which nature had bestowed. And she succeeded. She gave, at Lady Rawson's request, a light sketch of

ner life, from the death of her father, to the present time; touching, with a deep, quiet sense of the ridiculous, on the respectable Redman, and the elegant Mr. John, till Lady Rawson declared she would know them anywhere. Many of the drolleries and small inconveniences of her life in Paris, too, furnished amusement for her guest. But like those double pictures, which change with the amount of light placed at the back, the deeper shades of sorrow and of feeling were not displayed by the sunshine of humour slightly cast upon them.

But when she was alone Madeline buried her face in her hands, and thought long and passionately. What was her crime, that circumstances should make it shame to have the love of a man that nature told her was her equal? "He, too, feels I am his equal! and I will make him acknowledge it yet. She thinks I have had the '*misfortune* to attract him.'" Misfortune she could not think it! No! at the idea she raised her head, and a proud smile stole round her lips. What! she, who had been patronised by the young Comerfords, and considered lucky to have an offer from Sam Moorcroft!—she could draw the proud, fastidious Dudley Ashurst to wander about those old ruins on the mere chance of meeting her! After all, however, that might be but Lady Rawson's fancy. Ah! what would she not give to have her dear, dear father back to live and work for—to have a home, however poor, some one to think of beside herself. Then, indeed, there would be no temptation, however brilliant, that could win her from her labour of love. But as it was, she shuddered at her own loneliness, her appalling freedom. Yet she could love so well. She knew this, and heartily did she pray for some charge—some object to be given her, even though it entailed a heavy task. Who cared for her now? Jessie had scarce room for her in her thoughts at such a time. Her aunt, the Countess de Fontarce, even had she lived, had nothing but *politesse* to bestow. Mrs. Redman hated a poor relation with the true currish instinct that snarls over an ungnawed and unrequired bone, rather than share it with the homeless, starving street-dog. There was poor Miss Foster, a persecuted, weak creature—"Yes," thought Madeline, in the magnificence of youthful imagination, "I will adopt her; as soon as I can see my way to a theatrical engagement, she shall come and live with me—she has always been kind —and oh! what a dreadful life she leads!"

Lady Rawson had gone. For nearly a week previous to the ball and theatricals, Lady Agnes and Madeline had been less disturbed, and Madeline had fought gallantly against the oft-recurring memory of Colonel Ashurst's words and looks.

The long anticipated night arrived, and Madeline, after most of the company were seated, placed herself quietly in the door-

way of the large drawing-room, the music-room being made a temporary theatre. The drawing-room was darkened to increase the effect of the stage, and Madeline was glad to know a retreat was open behind her into a quiet passage which led to a side staircase. The play proceeded with the average success of amateur plays, and loud applause.

It was half over, when Madeline became aware that some one had stolen softly in beside her in the dark doorway. She did not look or speak; yet she knew quite well it was Colonel Ashurst. At last he said in a low voice:

"I suppose you are determined never to walk out alone, since you lost your way?"

"No. I have made no determination, and I often enjoy a solitary ramble."

"That old castle is very attractive," remarked Colonel Ashurst, with some slight significance of tone.

"Very. Lady Rawson was charmed with the view, and much obliged to me for taking her there; she would otherwise have left without seeing it."

"Left—is she gone, then?"

"She left the day after we met you there."

Colonel Ashurst made no immediate reply; but when he spoke again there was a change in his tone, as though he was pleased at something.

"How is it you are not in the 'Corps Dramatique?'"

"They did not want me."

"Hum—not so sure of that! though I am reluctant to encourage your fancy for the stage. I must admit, I think you have the dramatic faculty."

"Ah! how pleased I am to hear you say so."

"Nevertheless, I imagine you never will go on the stage."

"Why, Colonel Ashurst?"

"Because I feel there is a different destiny in store for you."

There was something in these words, in the tone in which they were spoken, that made Madeline's heart thrill. He thought of her then—of her future. What! did he intend to take the direction of it into his own hands? For a moment her brain almost reeled with the wild delight of feeling she was an object to any one, but especially to such an embodiment of a girl's ideal as Colonel Ashurst. Before she could recover herself sufficiently to reply he was gone, as quietly as he had come. The play ended soon after, and the guests flocked to the supper-room. Lord Bracklyn, who had on several occasions annoyed Madeline by a sort of insolent admiration, now sought her out, and insisted on taking her into supper, which she as resolutely declined; and from the noisy pertinacity with which he continued to persuade

her, she fancied he was intoxicated. She was greatly distressed; he was in general easily put down, but seemed now quite above or below ordinary considerations. Just as her dilemma was at its height, Colonel Ashurst made his appearance.

"Come along, Bracklyn; Lady Templemore wants you," he said; and twining his arm through the cub's, turned him round with a force he could hardly have resisted.

The remainder of the evening was enchantment to Madeline; she danced to the music of an excellent military band, and two of those dances were with Dudley Ashurst, who selected her pupils and herself as his only partners.

"You must give me another waltz, Miss Digby," he said, when the company were beginning to disperse, "I do not know when I have danced before."

The waltz lasted some time, and when they were taking the last turn he said—

"Do you know why I wanted this waltz especially?"

"No."

"Because I am going away."

Madeline, thinking he meant for the evening, looked up in his face and smiled.

"I mean," he resumed, "I am going away from Trevallon—probably from England."

Madeline felt as if a bolt of ice had been driven into her bosom; but she was silent for a moment, then raising her eyes, said with marvellous composure—

"I suppose you do not care for the country when the shooting is over?"

"I leave with the utmost regret and reluctance; and never said good-bye more unwillingly than I do now."

They had stopped as he spoke, but his arm was still round her.

"Good-bye, Miss Digby," he added, and with the words pressed her for an instant to him—so unmistakably that Madeline felt dizzy with some strange feeling, coloured over cheeks and brow, and then turned deadly pale. Colonel Ashurst drew her arm through his and led her to a seat near an open window—a door-like French window, opening to a terrace. Having placed her there, he bowed, and was about to leave, when he suddenly turned, bent over her, and almost whispered—

"Forgive me. I have not offended you? Forgive me."

"Good-bye, Colonel Ashurst," said Madeline, steadily, but with sadness in her tones. He took her hand, looked into her eyes, and the next moment stepped through the open window, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIX.

RANDAL DUDLEY ASHURST, of Trevallon Hall, Chalkshire, North Wales, had been one of fortune's favourites, till she became weary of his recklessness. Born the younger of two brothers, he had been early placed in a cavalry regiment, and seen a little military and much sporting service in India. He was rather extravagant and self-indulgent, for he had never seen or known any other kind of life. Yet he was an immense favourite with both equals and inferiors, from his bright, genial temper, his pleasant voice, his bold, almost too daring, nature. When about twenty-five his elder brother died suddenly, and Randal came into the family estate, then but slightly encumbered. He did not quit the army, but went out as "unattached." Though a good deal in debt, his debts at that time were but a trifle to a man of eight thousand a year.

His first three seasons in London, however, with the intermediate shooting and hunting seasons at Melton Mowbray and Trevallon, together with a contested election, rather astonished the family solicitors.

Dudley Ashurst was the observed of all observers; the idol of clubs, drawing-rooms, and green-rooms; a munificent patron of art; a nominally successful competitor on the turf. In four years he had run the round of all possible excitements, and left himself little but the dregs of the cup, and they were tasteless, if not bitter.

In this breathless period he had frequently given promise of excelling in many ways. He had written a political pamphlet; he had made a capital speech in the House of Commons. Men of note had spoken of him as a future minister; but somehow nothing lasted long; his writing was disturbed by a *liaison* with a certain beautiful viscountess, with whom his name was frequently coupled. Then a general election came on, and he declared he was sick and weary of the humbug of politics, especially as he had no opponent to rouse him to action. Then came an interval of European travel—more necessity for raising money. Then an interval of weariness—a heavy reckoning of crippled resources. And then the Crimean war broke out. Ashurst once more threw himself eagerly into military life, and was considered a most promising officer; none bore hardship better; none cared more kindly and thoughtfully for the wants of his soldiers, until himself incapacitated by a wound, which sent him home, and made it impossible for him to volunteer for India, as he would otherwise have done. So when sufficiently recovered, he departed on a long journey through the countries of Asia Minor, from which he had been scarce a year returned when he met Madeline Digby.

Women had played a large part in Ashurst's history. He was keenly alive to beauty; yet his was no vulgar voluptuary's admiration for mere flesh and blood. It is true he had never known the purifying influence of mother or sister; and though he had the natural chivalry of a strong man and a high-born gentleman—that is, he would face any danger to help a woman—yet he had no ideal of female purity or truth. Women were pleasant things to him; and perhaps had circumstances thrown him early with a true woman of the nobler stamp, he might have thought and felt very differently. His whole life would probably have borne a different character. But he judged by what he had experienced, and so to him women were toys—troublesome, *piquante* toys—not to be unkindly dealt with, but of no real importance in a man's life, though he knew that one or two had done him considerably more harm than good, having turned him aside from graver objects, and weakened him with annoyances he yet despised himself for feeling. He was too well tempered to turn sour; but as he came near the middle term of forty, he felt a dull weariness, a scepticism of happiness he neither could nor would analyze. His days dragged on indifferently, and even his monetary embarrassments ceased to afford him a sensation. In this mood—the chambers both of head and heart swept and garnished—aching with emptiness, he knew not why, the current of life bore a pretty little straw to his feet—and that straw was Madeline Digby. Not since the enthusiasm of early youth lent charms to every object had his imagination been so possessed as by that quiet girl, with her dark, steadfast eyes, so brave in their innocence, and the contrast of the strong, calm spirit in her fragile, tender frame. Then there was a composed self-reliance, inexpressibly delightful to a man wearied of the fluttering consciousness of common-place, weakly, well-dressed women. Nay, the strange, almost indescribable, way in which Madeline seemed to acknowledge his higher social position, while in matters of taste, thought, and feeling, she addressed him with all the frank security of an equal, roused him to the strongest interest. He could not with her, as he had with so many—"come, see, and conquer." She could meet his eye, even when it expressed admiration. She could differ from him, almost defy him; and her idea took sudden and complete possession of him.

Walking or sleeping she was there, and always seemed to say—"Win me if you can!"

It was the strongest, the most overwhelming passion he had ever known, and he was just at the period when such a feeling obtains the most complete mastery. The glow of the Indian summer which comes back to man in the prime of physical and intellectual life has in it a sultry warmth which the springtide

heat never knew! Yet there was much of tenderness in all he felt for Madeline, nay respect; there was a relief in speaking to her, a charm in her voice, a grace in her every movement, inexpressibly satisfying to his fastidious taste, at their third or fourth interview he burned to tell her all he felt, how wildly he loved her—but he dared not. He feared to startle her, and he felt hers was no common mind, no common will,—to influence it he must go cautiously to work.

When a man of Dudley Ashurst's temperament and training feels thus to any object, to obtain it follows as a matter of course. He had therefore determined that Madeline should be his, even when he bid her good-bye, which, by the way, was a mere *ruse* to see how far he had progressed. It was scarce as successful as he hoped. Nevertheless he was tolerably satisfied, and so departed for London and his solicitors.

The Grange soon settled back to its old monotony after the gay company had gone, yet it was no longer the same to Madeline. Colonel Ashurst's last words left her a legacy of struggle. But she fought the good fight valiantly. When the echo of his words at their last interview would come whispering with unspeakable sweetness through memory's caverns, she strove to recal Lady Rawson's oracular sentence: "The fancy of such a man can only do you harm."

"Oh!" she often thought wearily, "what is the use of this perpetual effort against nature?—where will it lead? what reward have I beyond? who cares for me?" Then she grew pale and thin, but still she fought on, and was beginning to regain self-command; she threw herself eagerly into study, and spurred on her pupils till Lady Templemore herself suggested that Miss Digby really worked too hard.

"Moderation in all things is true wisdom," said her ladyship, "and though you manage to interest Agnes, I think you excite her too much, she looks but indifferent, I fancy a change would do her good. Lord Templemore's sister, Lady Augusta Hodges, and her family are at a bathing-place near Aberystwith; we shall go there next week, you will come with us, not to let Agnes run quite wild, so make your arrangements; we shall probably start about the fifteenth."

Madeline rejoiced in the probability of a change giving her new strength and fresh ideas, she therefore went cheerfully about her preparations. Meantime a happy letter from Mrs. Downing informed her of her arrival at her new home, where she hoped Madeline would soon visit her. Madeline sighed over the letter, feeling, in some curious and prophetic way, that the quiet secure joys of home were never to exist for her.

Two days before that on which Madeline was to accompany

Lady Templemore and her pupils to Aberystwith, she awoke with an odd dizzy pain in her head, and a dryness in her throat; but she took no notice of it till towards evening, when she was obliged to excuse herself from appearing in the drawing-room. The next morning she was unable to rise, and Lady Agnes' report soon brought Lady Templemore to see what was the matter.

"You are quite feverish, Miss Digby, your pulse very uncertain, I shall send for Dr. Jones at once, anything or everything may begin with a feverish cold. How do you think you caught it? By some imprudence, no doubt!"

Lady Templemore was always annoyed with people when they got ill, even her own children; she never had anything the matter with herself, and she greatly resented the indisposition of a governess.

As soon as it was possible Dr. Jones made his appearance in obedience to her ladyship's summons. He humm'd and ha'd, said that the "larynx" was a good deal inflamed, and the whole system prostrate. Had Miss Digby had any mental distress? for her condition was very much what might be the result of a bad cold supervening on a state of nervous depression.

Lady Templemore said, "No, nothing; she was as happy as possible. Did Dr. Jones think any infection might ensue?"

Dr. Jones would not commit himself. "It possibly might turn to scarlet fever—small-pox was not altogether out of the question; at any rate her ladyship would do well to remove her family out of reach of any possible danger."

So the result of the doctor's visit was a bottle, a sixth part four times a day, a gargle, a diet of milk and arrowroot and barley-water, and increased diligence in packing on the part of the ladies' maids, as Lady Templemore decided on starting by an earlier train than she had intended.

Before Madeline settled for the night, Lady Templemore paid her a visit, attended by the stately housekeeper. "I wished to see you, Miss Digby, this evening, because we start so early to-morrow, the doctor thinks we had better do so, lest your attack might prove infectious, but I shall leave you in charge of Brown," nodding towards the housekeeper, "who is an excellent nurse, and will let me know how you go on. I have told Dr. Jones to be very attentive, but at the same time not to run you up too long a bill, and Brown will see you want for nothing; you will excuse Elizabeth and Agnes coming to say good-bye, it would not be prudent." So saying her ladyship walked away, and Mrs. Brown remained a moment longer, merely to inform Miss Digby that Susan the school-room maid would sleep in her room and attend upon her. This last piece of information was very pleasant to Madeline. Susan was a sympathetic kindly girl, and had always shown Madeline almost affectionate attention. So the night closed in, the weary

night, and poor Madeline alternated between short snatches of sleep tormented by horrible dreams, and long intervals of restless tossing. She could not touch food, she burned with thirst, and next morning, when Mrs. Brown paid her an early official visit, she made a very alarming report to Lady Templemore as she was stepping into the carriage.

"I am sure," remarked her ladyship to my lord, "it was most fortunate, both that we had made all arrangements to go to Lady Augusta, and also that Miss Digby's illness showed itself in time to leave her behind."

"Poor girl," ejaculated Lord Templemore, "I hope they will take good care of her."

In spite of the attentions of Susan, the sense of desertion, when she knew the house was empty, pressed heavily on the weakened nerves of the lonely patient. What if she grew worse! What if she died without one friendly hand to close her eyes! one friendly voice to say "Alas! my sister." Yet, where would she be better off? Jessie would herself, she knew, willingly come to her. But now "another king had arisen in Jessie's heart who knew not Madeline," and even though Madeline sent for her, perhaps her husband would not let her come. Miss Foster? Yes, she would like to be with her; but that was simply impossible. Oh! to be with the good nuns in the tranquil convent! How lonely, how desolate she was. Her feeling of horror for the Grange became morbid. She would be better off anywhere else. So the weary days rolled over. But Madeline, after all, had only a severe feverish cold, and the fifth night after Lord and Lady Templemore's departure, nature came to the doctor's aid, and Madeline, soothed by a profuse perspiration, slept long and profoundly.

On waking, she announced herself as quite well, she felt such a sudden and complete relief, and Susan rejoiced accordingly: but now an interval of great weakness ensued, which was only terminated by frequent drives in the open air. Then Lady Templemore wrote that she had better arrange to visit some of her friends previous to the return of her pupils, that her rooms might be thoroughly purified, and she might meet them refreshed and invigorated. This was as yet impossible, but in a week Madeline thought she might be well enough to visit Mrs. Downing, if she was able to receive her; Stapleton, the town where the elegant Mr. Downing held the appointment before mentioned, being not more than thirty miles from the nearest station to the Grange.

She therefore wrote to Jessie, telling her how ill she had been, and begging she would say candidly if a visitor would be convenient or not. Feeling much stronger the day after this epistle was despatched, she ventured, for the first time, into the plantation alone, and, enjoying the fresh October day, with its sober grey

beauty and deep autumnal tints, she strolled on half unconsciously, till she reached the keep of the castle. She had not visited it since the day Lady Rawson had accompanied her there, and she now sat down on a fragment of broken wall, to muse sadly—to try and plan out the future. She would leave Lady Templemore—that she decided. The isolated life she led at the Grange appalled her, though she knew she had no reasonable cause of complaint. She would have sufficient with what remained from the sale of her aunt's lace, and perhaps the produce of a little more, together with six months' salary, to keep her till she could find some other employment, and—but her thoughts were checked, the very current of her blood arrested, by a voice close beside her which said: "I hardly hoped you could walk so far;" and her hand was gently taken by Colonel Ashurst in both of his.

Startled, overpowered, unequal to control herself, Madeline shook from head to foot, and the large eyes, larger than ever, because the face was slighly attenuated, filled up, and then welled over, with round pearly drops; yet she strove to smile, and succeeded.

"I am very weak, and you startled me," she said, drawing away her hand slowly.

Ashurst sat down at her side, he looked kindly and gravely into her eyes: "I see I did, and I am sorry, but I had been watching you for some time, trying to think how I should least startle you, and ended by doing so most effectually. Now tell me what has been the matter with you."

"Only a bad cold and low fever, but I fancied I was going to die; I suppose sick people generally do, and I never was sick before."

"And they left you—perhaps to die," said Ashurst in a low voice, as if to himself.

"You must not blame Lady Templemore for that; the doctor thought the attack might be infectious, and she was right to take care. I am a stranger, without any claim on her—or," she added with an irrepressible craving for sympathy, "on any one."

Colonel Ashurst bit his lip, but kept silent. "You are much better?" he asked, looking into her face with so deep an expression of interest, that a new life seemed suddenly to pour itself through Madeline's veins.

"Oh yes, much, much better! but how," she asked, suddenly feeling puzzled, "how did you know I was ill? I did not think you were here—I thought you were in London—or on the Continent—how is it you are here?"

"I am here," he returned, smiling, "and that is all you must know at present;" and then he began to speak on other subjects in a calm, friendly tone, which put Madeline at her ease, and

stilled the wild throbbing of her heart, which had so oppressed her at their first meeting. Madeline, however, dared not let herself indulge too long in this delightful interview.

"I must be prudent, and return," she said, "though the evening is delicious; it would not do to take fresh cold."

"Let me see you safe into Lord Templemore's grounds?" said Colonel Ashurst.

"Thank you; and will you not tell me how you knew I was ill?"

"I will tell you all about it, Miss Digby, if you will stroll up here to-morrow, at the same time."

Madeline hesitated: ought she not to refuse? The mere fact of seeking such an interview indicated more of interest in her than was safe with a man of Colonel Ashurst's station, yet to refuse was to cut herself off from the one enjoyment life seemed to offer, something she could neither define nor resist, seemed to compel her to accede.

"You will probably go out shooting to-morrow, and forget to come," she said, with a soft sad smile.

"You know I shall not," said Ashurst, very emphatically. "There is not any extraordinary breach of *les bienséances* in country neighbours accidentally meeting."

"Accidentally," repeated Madeline, with an arch smile.

"Well, designedly, if you prefer the naked truth; but call it what you will, do not refuse my request?"

"If I feel as well as I do to-day I will be here," said Madeline, speaking low and quickly.

"And if you are not, I shall conclude you are worse, and will come to the Grange to look for you."

"A desperate threat," returned Madeline, with a bright smile; and then, as they had reached the plantation, she gave him her hand in token of dismissal. He held it a moment or two longer than was necessary, and then let her go with an earnest "Remember!"

He leant his arm upon the wicket gate, covered his face with his hand, and thought long; then raising his head, with a settled and resolute expression on his countenance, he whistled to his dogs, and walked slowly away in the direction of Trevallon Hall.

Madeline, too, sped homeward, but in a very different mood from that in which she had left it scarce two hours before. She was deeply stirred; she knew she had been unwise in giving a promise to meet Colonel Ashurst, nevertheless, she longed unspeakably for to-morrow; yet, what had he to tell her to which she might allow herself to listen? He entertained no mere feeling of friendship for her, on that point she could hardly deceive herself.

It was for her now to profit by Lady Rawson's warning, and think of the "hereafter." Instead of which, she allowed herself to

feel that life had still much sunshine; that she was by no means deserted or desolate; that her existence, so far from being poverty-stricken, was full of riches; that Jessie, instead of being in an enviable position, was to be pitied, because she could know nothing of the wild unreasoning delight which filled Madeline's soul. And all this, because Dudley Ashurst had returned to Trevallon, and was mysteriously well informed as to herself.

"Law, miss, but your walk has done you good!" cried the little school-room maid when she brought in the tea-things. "You look quite another lady!" Madeline, conscience-stricken, coloured to the roots of her hair, and felt perfectly transparent in poor Susan's simple eyes. A letter lay upon the tea-tray. It was from Jessie: both her husband and herself would be delighted to welcome Madeline the following week. Arthur was longing to make acquaintance with Miss Digby. Jessie pined to embrace her, and show her her pretty new house and furniture.

That was all well then. She forced herself to sit down and reply, accepting the arrangement of next week for her visit; yet with a vague feeling that to-morrow's interview might totally change her future. And then she wrote to Lady Templemore, informing her that the next week might be devoted to the task of purification, and then she would be no longer an obstacle to their return home.

And so to rest. Wearied with unwonted excitement, she slept profoundly. How delicious was the first waking thought, "I shall see him to-day," though with the sunshine came the shadow—the "Beware!" which ever linked itself with Colonel Ashurst since Lady Rawson's warning. Still, something of a hope that all might turn out better than she dare anticipate, lurked in her heart, glowed on her cheek, and deepened the dark lustre of her eyes.

The day dragged on, the hour came, and she stood with a beating heart at the wicket gate. At a little distance Colonel Ashurst leant against a rowan tree, his dog at his feet.

He came forward to meet her with gentle courtesy, and carefully regulated voice. The world-trained man held himself well in hand, while the inexperienced girl was as transparent to him in her doubts and hopes, her modest fears, and the traitor love nestling in her heart, ready to open the door of the sanctuary, as if that fair bosom was open before him. There were some ingredients, however, in the spirit he contemplated, of which he was but dimly aware.

Colonel Ashurst met Madeline as if by accident, and they strolled rather silently, side by side, to the fragment of wall where the view was finest.

"You had better rest, Miss Digby; you are looking wonderfully better. Do you feel stronger?"

"Yes, much stronger."

"Equal to any amount of argument?" he asked smiling.

"No; I do not want to argue, Look, there is the white cairn, that lured me to my wanderings two months ago. Does it not look near?"

"Yes, very near, only you did not allow for the dip of the ground between—and now, have you no remains of your curiosity? Do you not care to know to-day how I became informed that you had been ill—that Lady Templemore had deserted you, and you were left to recover or die alone?"

"I have told you that you blame Lady Templemore unjustly. I do not. But yes, I should like to know what accident brought all this to your notice. Lord Bracklyn perhaps told you? But no, he has been in Scotland."

"I will tell you all about it. The day after Lady Templemore's ball I went to town. I was obliged. I have been busy ruining myself for some years, and my errand to town was in pursuance of that employment. I was resolved not to be left in the dark respecting you—surrounded as you were by wretched cubs, ready to presume upon their standing, and ill-natured women of the world, ready to construe trifles into evil. Do you follow me, Miss Digby?" He had thrown himself on the grass, leaning one elbow on the piece of ruined wall where Madeline was sitting, so as to look full into her eyes under the shade of her broad hat. Madeline bent her head. "I left behind me a faithful ally—almost a friend—an old French valet, who has been with me for years. Men laugh at me for keeping so antediluvian a servitor. I do not care. I have learned to doubt many people and things, but I still believe in Antoine! Well; I left Antoine at Trevallon, with strict orders to report every movement of every member of Lord Templemore's family. I named no name, remember. In due time I received a report:—'Lord and Lady Templemore have gone with the young ladies to Aberystwith. Mademoiselle Digby remains behind seriously ill.' When this reached me I was lingering in London, undecided whether to return, or fly from Trevallon—certain to be wretched in either case. These tidings decided me. The idea of your lying ill, suffering, abandoned to the care of servants, drew me back to Trevallon irresistibly. Yet what could I do for you! Still I was within reach, and I lingered about, and obtained constant information without direct inquiry, and at last I met you! Now," gently taking her hand, and pressing his lips fondly upon it, "Madeline, you have my secret! You know what has inspired all this thought about you! You must know I love you! But how passionately your nature perhaps cannot divine!"

Madeline's long-fringed lids half closed, to hide her eyes from

his. For a moment she left her hand in his grasp unresistingly—a moment she wished might be prolonged for ever, or that she might pass away from it into eternal oblivion. What words! What a voice for the neglected, unloved orphan to hear—and addressed to herself! Her lips moved, but she could not speak. She drew away her hand. "Madeline!" continued Colonel Ashurst, "you have heard me! I love you! I love you!" he repeated passionately. "Speak to me."

Madeline covered her face with her hands, and then clasping them together, rested them on her knee in an attitude of resignation, and replied with strange calmness: "You love me! Why have you let yourself love me? It is at least discomfort for you. It may, it might be the deepest grief to me."

"It need not be either, Madeline," returned Ashurst, watching her closely. She seemed buried in thought.

"Our stations in life are so widely apart," she said, after a pause, "that we ought to be nothing to each other. You are a man of rank, a future peer; I, a humble worker for my bread. Yet," she continued, flushing quickly, "I cannot feel it. I recognise no difference between us at this moment."

"Feelings such as mine annihilate all distinctions. I know there is no extravagance or folly I could not commit for you. But I will not deceive you. Marriage with any one is impossible for me. To wed you, dearest, would be ruin—to wed any one else, despair."

"It is as I expected," said Madeline, with the same sad composure. "You love me, you would do anything for me, except to link yourself to me for ever! Notwithstanding, you care for me so much that you are grieved at the idea of my being left alone to the care of servants! You like to leave yourself an opening through which to creep away, and leave me to a loneliness a thousand times worse than any I have ever known!" She was silent, her heart swelling to suffocation.

"No, Madeline! you wrong me! By heaven you do! I cannot marry; but I would be as true to you, as constant—ay, a thousand times more so—than the most orthodox husband that ever took the vows in church! After all, what is the difference? You, surely, with your bright intelligence, must have observed the hollow shams which people dignify as domestic virtue and purity of life! Madeline, a real marriage is constancy—intense regard for each other's welfare. What would be the world's opinion to hearts that felt like this? Mine has been a cold, hollow life, Madeline. You have taught me love such as I never felt before! You have given me a glimpse of a paradise of companionship such as I never dreamed of! Do not tear it from me! I cannot live without you! or, if I do, it will be a broken and a

worthless life! I have never been false to man or woman. Why distrust me? Why destroy the exquisite happiness within our reach for a punctilio? I say *ours*, Madeline, for you love me!—I feel you must love me!" As he said this he knelt at her feet, and again possessed himself of her hand, looking into her eyes as though he would have drawn her soul through them.

"I do love you—I do!" returned Madeline, the intensity of her feelings lifting her for the moment above her natural reluctance to make such an avowal; "and though I have seen and known enough to make me well aware how unlikely a man of your station should marry a woman of mine, your words have given me a bitter pang. Let us speak no more; let us part here. Why did we ever meet? What have I done? What curse is upon me that life should be so wretched? Yours is the first glimpse of love I have known since I was left an orphan; and that which might have been so sweet is a grief, a misfortune unspeakable!"

"I cannot let you go, yet. Listen to me once more. If you refuse me, what does life give you in exchange? Years of toil, of loneliness! To whom do you owe duty or consideration? Who has given you any? With me you would have a happy home; you would be in real truth my wife! We would wander together through all the fairest scenes of the world, untrammelled by the hollow conventionalities of society, and living for each other! I should be another and a better man with your companionship; and while life was left me, cherish you fondly, tenderly—comprehending you as none else could. Think, Madeline, of the long sunny lapse of such a life! And what would it cost? You have no tender parent to vex. If you had, I grant you might well hesitate. To me you are all the world! but, dearest, what are you to others? Who else pines for you?—who else thirsts for a glance from those dark eyes, or a tone of that gentle voice, as I do? Then, remember, though I must not wed you, I will never—never, by all I hold most sacred—wed another! No, I will not take an answer now! You are weak; you do not grasp the subject with your usual clearness and strength of intellect, or you would see that I offer you all the real advantages of a happy marriage—all except the name!"

"Sophistry—mere sophistry!" returned Madeline, sadly. "But you must let me go! I shall see you no more."

"You must get *my* consent before you can be sure of that. Madeline, do not leave me in anger! forgive me if I have offended you—if I have given you credit for a little more breadth of view than women in general possess."

"I forgive you; I am not offended," said Madeline, with bitter humility, "you are, I suppose, the same as others. I knew that my lot in life was fixed too low to permit of my being any-

thing save a toy to such as you, however superior to such a destiny I may think myself. But, at least, I strove to shun you. Why did you seek me? Why have you shown me a glimpse of paradise which yet I must not enter? Farewell! Colonel Ashurst," she concluded, rising suddenly, and feeling her voice fail her.

But Dudley Ashurst stopped her again, covering her hand with kisses; and pouring forth the most ardent expression of affection, he swore he would never give her up; that he would love her a thousand times more as a lover than a husband, and only ceased when he saw how deadly pale she became, how exhausted and terrified she looked. Then he was all penitence and regret, and insisted on escorting her through the plantation to the edge of the pleasure-ground.

"I will write to you, and you will reply, will you not?"

Madeline shook her head, and entreated him to leave her, which at last, with evident reluctance, he did.

CHAPTER XX.

It was a proud and happy day to Mrs. Downing when, having put her neat little home in order, and enjoined her servant to be sure to have on her afternoon dress by the time she returned, she sallied forth to meet Madeline at the railway station. She was sincerely attached to her former schoolfellow, and she felt sure she would rejoice heartily in her good fortune. Mrs. Downing had some time to wait. These country short-distance trains are seldom punctual. But it arrived at last, and the warm-hearted Jessie was greatly shocked and distressed to see how worn and ill Madeline looked.

"I had no idea you had been so ill!" she exclaimed, kissing her. "Why, you only spoke of a bad cold!"

"I am still very weak, and I do not think the Grange agrees with me," returned Madeline.

"Well, I shall nurse you and send you back quite strong; and Arthur will be so pleased to see you. He would have come to meet you, but cannot get away from his work in the daytime, except just to dinner, and that is a great comfort." Jessie prattled away so cheerfully that she did not observe Madeline's silence and pre-occupation; nor had she, in the joy of meeting, noticed that a tall, aristocratic-looking gentleman had stepped out of the railway carriage directly after Madeline had left it. In truth, the journey had been a trying one to Madeline. For Colonel Ashurst had joined her, to her great astonishment, at the next station, after she had got in; and as no other passenger had interrupted

their *tête-à-tête*, he had an opportunity he did not fail to use to the uttermost of repeating and renewing the arguments and protestations—backed by many a fresh suggestion—which he had before urged. He had written to Madeline, but she had not replied. She found it easier to neglect a letter than to resist pleadings enforced by the inexpressible charm of voice, and look and manner. The journey then had been exhausting to her, weak as she was. She felt almost irresistibly inclined to let herself go, and float down the current that seemed setting too strong for her. But she roused herself, and desired Colonel Ashurst, with a sort of despairing languor, to molest her no more.

She presented, in consequence of this agitating interview, anything but an air of convalescence to her friend's eye. However, Jessie, full of the delights of her own home, reckoned with certainty on the revivifying effect such a moral atmosphere would have upon her friend.

"You see it is rather a smoky place, dear, but our cottage is in a much better part, and when the wind is not west we do not get any smoke at all." So said Mrs. Downing, as they drove through the dingy, ashy-looking streets. "Neilson and Co.'s works are by the river, quite out of the town, and our cottage is just outside, on their grounds, you know, and we have no rent to pay, which is a great help. We hope to have a nice garden, next summer. Arthur understands all about gardening, and, indeed, I believe, about everything, but the evenings are too short to work at it now."

"Very likely," said Madeline, speaking reluctantly. She wanted Jessie to go on, and leave her to recal the tender, impassioned, refined tones so freshly vibrating on her heart.

"You are quite exhausted, I dare say, and it is nearly six o'clock. We will have tea directly we go in, whether Arthur has come home or not." Here the fly skirted a high, flinty-looking wall, from behind which came a constant din of hammering and rattling of metallic substances, like theatrical thunder. "These are Neilson's works," said Jessie, eagerly. "They employ altogether nearly three hundred hands, and my husband has charge of more than two hundred. You know that is a great responsibility, but he is quite equal to it, and, I believe, gives his employers the greatest satisfaction. That is the principal entrance." Here they passed a wide gateway with a blue arch, bearing the inscription in gold letters, "Neilson & Co.: Iron Foundry," through which came and went sooty men in white trousers and jackets much smeared with black.

"There is another smaller gate close by our house," continued Jessie, "which is a great convenience."

The wall now ceased, and they came out on a road which over-

hung a river, with a pretty orchard-covered bank opposite, and a bold single-arched bridge in front, and soon drew up before a new-looking cottage, in what builders call the "Tudoresque style," built of colored bricks. An open space covered with stones and ragged grass intervened between it and the road, from which it was fenced off by a very fanciful iron railing, and behind at some distance towered the foundry wall.

"Here we are, dear Madeline," cried Jessie, with sparkling eyes, "at Woodbine Cottage, at least it will be Woodbine Cottage next year, when the woodbine has grown," and with a hearty kiss, Mrs. Downing ushered her friend into a little porch, and then into a passage somewhat dark, and with a fresh mortar smell. There was a kitchen, and small living room at the back, with a view over a potato-patch to the foundry wall, and a tolerably-sized sitting room, with a projecting window in front, which Jessie designed to be her drawing-room. Four bedrooms above, and a Tudoresque garret for the small servant, completed the abode of bliss.

The furnishing was as yet incomplete; the future drawing-room had only blinds and a carpet—a dark-green mossy-looking carpet, which Madeline admired, greatly to Jessie's delight.

"I am making the curtains myself."

"Indeed," said Madeline, her kindly heart warming to her friend's happiness, "you must let me help you while I am here."

"How delightful that will be," and Mrs. Downing clapped her hands.

Then Madeline was introduced to her room, a neat little chamber, but as yet curtainless: and then tea was announced.

There was a cheerful bit of fire in the common sitting-room, the furniture of which was complete, and a tempting tea-table daintily spread. Jessie herself in a pretty grey dress, and pink ribbons, while on the hearth-rug stood the master.

Mr. Arthur Downing was a spare man, of middle height, with small sharp black eyes, and a wide thin mouth. He was an intelligent, capable, square-headed young man, and kept his hair neatly parted, and conveniently short. He wore a morning coat, and trousers of iron-grey, and had on his slippers.

"How are you, Miss Digby?" he said, advancing a step or two from the rug, on being introduced. "Sorry to find Mrs. Downing thinks you but indifferent—must try and pick up here."

Lord Templemore was not one half so patronising as was Mr. Arthur Downing. The combined sense of importance as a husband and a householder was almost too much for his mental balance when in his own territory. Of course, out in the world of men, he was quiet and business-like enough. But home and an adoring wife would develope the weaknesses of any man.

Madeline, however, accepted his patronage with great philosophy; it rather amused her, and diverted her thoughts. In short, the total change, the tone of wholesome reality, did her good, and one of her best symptoms was a return of her sense of humour.

Tea was a serious meal at Woodbine Cottage, and in honour of the invalid, a spatch-cock fowl graced the repast.

"This is better than last time, Jessie," said her husband, with grave approbation. "Let me send you a wing, Miss Digby—try a little Worcester sauce and butter with it—you'll find it palatable. Jessie, there is no Worcester sauce on the table."

"Oh, dear me! I forgot," cried Mrs. Downing, penitentially, and jumping up, "but I have it in the cupboard."

"That's not on the table," said her husband, facetiously, with a loud laugh at his own wit. "I fancy, Miss Digby, they taught you very little that was useful at Miss Jones's. You see, a man does not want French, or Italian, or music; but he does want a comfortable meal, and a neat house, with the smallest possible out lay. Jessie has a deal to learn, and I suppose you are no better."

"We certainly had no chance of studying cookery at school, and it must be a terrible loss when a woman is at the mercy of an ignorant servant through her own want of household teaching; but I suppose it is quickly acquired—when there is a will, there is a way."

"Still," said Mr. Downing, with his mouth full, "the acquiring costs a lot of money."

"Come, Arthur," said Mrs. Downing, with a smile, though there was the least possible shade of pain in her face, "I have not managed so badly—eh?"

"You might be worse, and no doubt, you might be better, too; but you'll do yet—if you mind me."

There was a pause. Madeline felt half-indignant for her friend. Here was this man infinitely her inferior in taste, nature, culture, treating her like a servant, while she was humbly grateful for any crumbs of approbation he chose to let fall. He asked her to fetch him his pocket-handkerchief which he had left outside in his overcoat, and had sent her with a message to the kitchen touching hot water; and all this without once offering to stir himself. He talked a good deal, and described his intended improvements in the cottage at great length, and then he asked many questions respecting Lady Templemore's house and management, and Madeline's position there, and seemed rather astonished to find she was shown any courtesy or attention. Then he recounted, for Madeline's benefit, the history of Lady Templemore's father, evidently receiving encouragement and pleasure himself from this record of successful industry.

From this conversation, Madeline thought she could foretell that

he would be a rising man. His objects seemed few, and clearly set before him; he had a strong narrow intelligence, a firm will, and a decided affection for self. How Jessie could love this hard, common man, and believe him a superior being, passed Madeline's comprehension; she feared her friend's future did not promise to be so blissful as she had hoped. In such a union Jessie would have to give all and get very little in return. How would it be in moments of weakness or depression—when she wanted tenderness, soothing, sympathy! where was the faculty to supply them in the accurate, self-satisfied Mr. Downing? He would pay a doctor for her, but beyond this, he could or would do nothing. Then, when the words and tones she had listened to that day came back to her in startling contrast, she could hardly keep down the thought, "Better be the mistress of Dudley Ashurst, than a wife like Jessie!"

However, all was sunshine to her friend's simple nature—a nature that must look up, and had no thought of self. The fact of Arthur's immeasurable superiority was far more clear to her than any worth of her own—a view in which her husband fully coincided—and moreover, whatever small grains of humility had leavened his self-satisfaction as a lover, three or four weeks of marriage sufficed to extract them, and leave him the conviction that he was a deuced good-natured fellow to have taken pity on the little girl and married her, though, indeed, she was a credit to his taste; but then, *he* never made a mistake in taste!

After an hour of conversation, Mr. Downing became drowsy, and quietly stretching himself on the only sofa, was soon wrapped in slumber.

Madeline and Jessie continued to speak in a low voice, not to disturb the "master's imperial repose;" they talked of school characters and incidents—innocent gossip! till Madeline, wearied after the day's excitement, asked to go to bed.

It was long, however, before she slept. The reminiscences recalled by her talk with Jessie, seemed to bring out with startling effect the deep chasm between her present and her past; she recalled the dreams and aspirations of those early, lonely days—and now she was as lonely as ever—with just a glimpse of exquisite enjoyment and companionship: but across what a Rubicon! What would the passing of that barrier cost her?

The love and regard of Jessie, the respect of honest men and women, the contemptuous triumph of her grandmother in the fulfilment of her own prophecy, "the daughter of that Digby would never turn out well." And Ashurst? what was his love worth if it subjected her to all this? She recalled all the dignified axioms concerning a lover's devotion and esteem for the beloved object—all the homilies she had ever heard or read about female modesty

and virtue, still she could *not* lash herself into anger against Dudley Ashurst.

The lessons that she had been so bitterly taught on all sides, of her own insignificance, of the insurmountable nature of worldly considerations, of the vast importance of social rank, and lastly, of the heinous folly of supposing any man, not an idiot, would sacrifice his self-interest for any woman, had sunk deep into her heart. As for Dudley Ashurst thinking of her as a wife, she never dreamed of such an impossibility; and yet she could not be angry with him for loving her; and, oh! he did love her!—right or wrong, moral or immoral—he loved her; and she could not resent it; she only dimly, wearily wished he had never told her so—never broken the monotony of her life with so fair, so fleeting a vision.

The breakfast at Woodbine Cottage was early, too early as yet for Madeline, so she kept her room; but she heard Mr. Downing making a great to-do about his boots and his breakfast, his pocket-book, which he had left up-stairs, and divers other behests; and she recognised Jessie's light quick step up-stairs and down, with little intermission, till the closing of the little gate outside, and a sudden lull within, told her that the "lord and master" had departed.

Immediately afterwards, Jessie made her appearance, carrying a little tray covered with a snowy cloth, and bearing a nice cup of coffee, a fresh egg, and some crisp toast.

"My dear Jessie! why add to your fatigues by waiting on me! you have been running about all the morning; you should have made your servant bring me my cup of coffee."

"You do not suppose I would let any one else bring you your breakfast; besides, I enjoy being busy and active."

However, when Madeline came into the little sitting-room, about an hour after, she saw plainly that Jessie was tired, and glad to sit down.

They had a pleasant morning, working together at the drawing-room curtains. At one o'clock Mr. Downing came home to his dinner. It was a short repast, and he said little, except to speak sharply and sternly respecting a dish-cover, which was not so bright as it ought to have been. Madeline thought it odd that he should bestow the scolding on his wife, who did not clean the covers. However, she said nothing, remembering the interference or even the notice of a third party would probably make matters worse. The evening was rather better. Mr. Downing, in the course of conversation, mentioned some newly-invented machine for abridging labour, and Madeline questioned with sufficient intelligence to interest him in replying. On a subject of which he

was master he spoke well, and proved a much more agreeable companion than on the previous evening.

It was agreed, before they separated for the night, that Mr. Downing should take Madeline and his wife over Mr. Neilson's works, as soon as the former was sufficiently strong.

But for the deep-rooted disturbance in Madeline's heart, she would have been very happy with Mrs. Downing, especially during those hours when the lord and master was absent. The quiet routine of household duty was pleasant to her womanly nature and instincts. She often thought how sweet it would be to decorate and regulate some humble home—such as that in which she now was—till it became a very heaven of refinement and peace. But to enjoy it, she must not be "mated to a clown,"—no! nor to a fine gentleman; but at least to a large-minded man. It is the petty vanities of men, perpetually fighting with a vague consciousness that manhood ought to put them above such small things, that renders so many difficult to live with, and cruel in the exercise of the power to torment which they possess.

"It is, indeed, as good fun as a cynic could ask," to hear a man, after worrying over a dozen minor miseries, all suggested by some accidental rub to a hidden raw on the surface of his self-conceit, turn upon his wife—baited into a fit of crying—and from the proud eminence of his superior reason, tell her she is a "weak fool." Well, there are, heaven knows! women enough to revenge these petty wrongs; and it is an awful sight to see a fine broad-souled honest man worried and stung by the small jealousies and meanness of a commonplace irreproachable woman.

Alas! that the tendency of life's current is to drift the round men into square holes, and *vice versâ!*

The fourth day after Madeline's arrival at Woodbine Cottage was Saturday, and the morning post brought Mrs. Downing a letter, which she read with a slight increase of colour.

"Hand it over," said Mr. Downing, who had not quite finished his breakfast, in a tone of command.

Jessie unhesitatingly obeyed.

"Oh! oh!" said Mr. Downing, in a loud jocular tone, "so Master Sam's coming to-day, is he? Deuced odd, Miss Digby, that he should get his holiday just now. I wonder what the attraction can be—don't you?"

"Is your brother coming to see you?" asked Madeline, a little puzzled by Mr. Downing's enigmatical address, and colouring with annoyance.

"So he says; but I did not ask him, Madeline! He says it is convenient for him to take his holiday now, and he always promised to come and see us as soon as he could."

"Of course—of course!" replied Madeline, doubly annoyed by this species of apology.

"Come, little woman," said Mr. Downing, "don't you be so green. I daresay Miss Digby will not be implacable; and, at any rate, no one can deny Sam has a right to come and see his relatives! 'specially when he knows he is welcome."

The rudeness of this speech rather amused than irritated Madeline. Mr. Downing was so thoroughly an accident in her existence, that she did not feel even faintly ruffled by his constant and careful assumption of mastery. She smiled, and said quietly, she would be glad to see Mr Moorcroft.

"Now," said Mr. Downing, "I like that! that's frank and honest, and no nonsense about it. I've a word or two more to say to you on the subject of Sam, but I haven't time now. Eight thirty, by Jove! I must be off. Jessie! get a lobster for supper, and something substantial besides."

Madeline did not think more of Mr. Sam Moorcroft's advent. His fancy for herself had probably died a natural death; and if not, she was lifted far away out of the reach of all such things. It was utter desecration that she, who was loved and sought by Dudley Ashurst (even with the left hand), should be looked at or dreamed of by other men.

Besides, she began to wonder she had heard nothing of him since they had parted at the station. He said that if she persisted in rejecting his proposition, that he would quit England—Europe—and she should hear no more of him. Could he already have put his threat into execution? Jessie called her away from these unhealthy musings. "If they worked hard, the curtains might be ready to put up after the early dinner, and, as it was Saturday, Arthur might get a man from the works to assist."

Madeline, delighted to have the current of her thoughts changed, threw herself heartily into the undertaking, and, Mr. Downing being half an hour late for dinner, they accomplished their task. Saturday was a half holiday, so Mr. Downing remained at table some little time, and indulged in a pipe, the fumes of which were rather too much for Madeline, accustomed as she was exclusively to the companionship of women. "What I wished to say to you, Miss Digby, is this" (puff, puff), said Mr. Downing, as he sat the "monarch of all he surveyed." "I have a regard for you as my wife's friend, and I have a respect for yourself, I think you have the making of a capital helpmate for any man. But then men don't trouble much about finding helpmates now—Lord bless you!—they are a drug in the market; and a nice young man with a nice business, like Sam Moorcroft, might have a dozen for holding up his finger. Now, on the other hand, you're a nice girl. I don't want to flatter; but you *are* a nice girl, and more sensible

and practical than many would give you credit for at first sight (that dish of soles, done French, as you taught Jessie, is very fine); but you aren't the only nice girl in England, and tho' you ought to have lots of tin, I daresay you hav'n't. Now, just attend to a few practical observations, and don't take offence where none is meant. Don't you go and throw cold water on Sam Moorcroft—he is a steady fellow—he'll be a rich man yet; he'll make a capital husband in one sense, for he'll give you a deuced deal too much of your own way. He is (I think) a fool to run after a girl that has rejected him; however that's his look-out; but I must say, from what I have seen of you, you'd make him a good wife. Now he is coming down after you, and take my advice; think twice before you throw away a good chance; a governess's life isn't all smooth and easy—youth slips away uncommon fast. How do you know you will ever have such another offer?"

"Oh! Arthur, dear!" remonstrated his wife.

"I am speaking common sense, Jessie."

"The words of wisdom from the lips of understanding," returned Madeline, amused, yet irritated at the impossibility of making a creature like Mr. Downing comprehend the immeasurable distance between herself and his world. "I am not offended, but a little amused, and yet I am obliged to you for interesting yourself in me. I see that although you condemn French morals, and French marriages, you adopt the same view of the subject. You are quite aware that I have no personal regard for Mr. Moorcroft, however grateful I ought to be for his preference, nevertheless you recommend me to accept him from prudential motives."

"By Jove," interrupted Mr. Downing, "they are the best motives."

"Very likely," returned Madeline, coolly. "I have, however, my own views of life, and shall tell you them, after which you will see if I am still a desirable helpmate for Mr. Sam Moorcroft. To remain as a resident governess *anywhere* is impossible. I have not enough employment—I have too much restraint. As a visiting-teacher of music or languages I should make more money, work harder, and live freer. This I intend to do early next spring. The difficulty of living alone I shall surmount in some way; but beyond this, by being so far my own mistress, I can employ any and every spare moment in studying music and dramatic art, as the opinion of my master, Signor G——, and my own inclination, direct me to the stage."

"Oh, Lord!" ejaculated Mr. Downing, disgusted.

"For my own part I see much to be avoided in married life. To me it would be great happiness or great misery. Now, as long as I can support myself, I would prefer being independent."

"But, Lord bless me, Miss Digby!" said Mr. Downing, laying

down his pipe with virtuous indignation. "Do you mean to say you would prefer exhibiting yourself on the stage to being the wife of an honest man; to be talked of and joked about by all the scamps in London, to a quiet home, with your children about you?"

"Yes," said Madeline, quietly. "I should not hear the disrespectful remarks (if they were made), and I know that Mrs. Charles Kean and Helen Faucit are as much respected as any woman can be."

"And have to put up with the society of vagabonds, and be a vagabond," put in Mr. Downing, warmly.

"The vagabondism has an attraction for me," returned Madeline, unmoved.

"Left alone in your old age without a friend or relative to close your eyes," continued Mr. Downing.

"I tell you what my conclusions are, Mr. Downing," said Madeline. "It seems to me that either the beginning or the end of life, for some, must be miserable; one person thinks it wise to sacrifice youth for the possible chance of being comfortable in age; another prefers the full enjoyment of the most enjoyable period, and lets age take its chance, this is my view. I see women offering themselves up on the shrines of husband and children, and does this secure them tenderness or comfort when the weariness of age comes upon them? unless they have money to leave behind them! I have elected my line—I do not see the necessity of marriage to happiness, nor does the stage necessarily entail loss of character. I think I have that in me to keep me straight. If I am successful, I shall both make and save money. If not, I can still keep myself by teaching; and for the future! it will be no worse for me than for many others. Were I to do your brother-in-law the injustice of marrying him, I should be a miserable disappointed woman, incapable of giving or receiving pleasure."

"In heaven's name go your own way," said Mr. Downing, a good deal startled at her tone, the curious indifference it expressed of all that a young girl values, especially opinion. "Only if you should come to grief, do not say I did not warn you."

Mr. Downing's disgust, however, was not proof against the common occupation of hanging the drawing-room curtains, about which he laid down the law as usual. All was serene when Sam Moorcroft arrived, which was in time for a late supper. Mr. Sam had evidently devoted much consideration to the subject of adornment. He had on a new chocolate brown suit, his hair had been recently cut and curled, and his whole turn-out was intended to convey an idea of superior London fashion among country bumpkins. He was less shy—more assured than formerly. Success was giving him belief in himself.

Madeline met him with frank kindliness, which even Mr. Downing, in his place, could not have construed into encouragement. Indeed, there was something of the great lady about Madeline, though she was perfectly unaffected; the extreme simplicity and repose of her manner, originating in complete freedom from any regard for the effect she might produce, and a certain reliance on her own convictions, irrespective of the opinions, at any rate, of those with whom she was now associated. Yet was she always gentle, and tenderly considerate of others, and this seeming softness led such superficial observers as Mr. Downing to believe her a timid, self-distrustful girl, till some chance word or topic disclosed the broad grasp of mind, the boldness of thought, the daring spirit, that lodged in that fair slight form.

Mr. Sam Moorcroft had much City gossip for his brother-in-law, and a pair of antimacassars, knitted by her own hand, a present from his mother to Jessie. He asked, with apparently deep interest, about Mr. Downing's sister, Miss Lizzie, declaring she was a most charming young lady. Mr. Sam was far too polite to term any one above the rank of a servant a girl. But then, as Jessie thought, every one could not possess the polished ease of an Arthur Downing! Poor Sam's efforts to rouse Madeline's jealousy were quite useless, and Mr. Downing, beginning to feel annoyed at her attitude of quiet superiority, bethought him that the desired lobster was missing—absent without leave.

"Jessie, I thought I told you to have a lobster," he said, rather crossly, "what's the reason I do not see one?"

"Oh dear! I am so vexed about it, Arthur. I went all over the town this morning, and could find but two, and they were so small, and so dear, I really had not the heart to buy one. I dare say Sam will excuse it."

"He may," said Mr. Downing portentously, "but I don't know that I shall. If there was such a difficulty, why did you not mention it to me at dinner-time?"

"Well, it would have been better if I had, but I quite forgot it."

"Ah! there's nothing so fatal to a man's comfort as a wife with a bad memory."

"Come, come, Downing," put in Sam, with a polite simper, "you will give Miss Digby a bad impression of matrimony. You cannot expect perfection, and a husband ought to make all sorts of allowances."

"I tell you what," retorted Mr. Downing, sharply, for he was annoyed, he scarce knew at what, "a husband has a right to expect every attention and thought from his wife, considering he boards and lodges her!"

Madeline felt a strong repulsion to the speaker, at this base

rendering of the sacred obligations of matrimony, and could not resist remarking, with quiet irony, "A very practical, sensible view of the matter, Mr. Downing, but of course the amount of attention and consideration must vary with the class of accommodation provided. For instance, a man who can keep two servants is entitled to a closer watchfulness than he who can afford only one. But where is the human heart that can supply a wealth of tender consideration sufficient to repay the man who gives his wife a carriage and horses, and new potatoes at Christmas!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Mr. Sam, but Mr. Downing did not like it at all. He fidgeted on his chair, and observed he did not think so sensible a young lady as Miss Digby could talk such nonsense. Madeline laughed good-humouredly, and the subject dropped. However, she soon saw that she had ceased to find favour in Mr. Downing's eyes. Her impious preference for the stage, compared to the nobler occupation of ordering Mr. Sam Moorcroft's dinner and mending his socks, had damaged her considerably in his opinion, but her application of his argument completed his disapproval.

The presence of Jessie's brother, together with a sort of undefined surliness in the master of the house, put an end to Madeline's comfort. She therefore availed herself of a note from Lady Templemore, to say her presence was required at the Grange, and cut short her visit by some days, parting from Jessie with infinite regret and many tears. She felt that her true-hearted, unselfish friend had passed into a terrible bondage, and she only prayed that she might never recognise it, but go on for ever believing in the superiority of her Juggernaut! Poor Jessie thought all Madeline's grief was on her own account, and was quite afflicted to part with her, yet evidently dared not urge her to stay, so they bid each other adieu, Madeline much disappointed at the result of her visit, which she had indistinctly hoped might have opened some loophole of escape from her own weakness, and the force of temptation she felt pressing upon her.

CHAPTER XXI.

Lady Agnes was really pleased to see her governess, there was always much sympathy between them. Lady Templemore and Lady Elizabeth were properly polite, but Madeline imagined there was an indefinable change in the former, as if she did not approve of Miss Digby so cordially as she used. But Madeline put the idea aside, as the result of a morbid and nervous state

of feeling. Of this she was conscious. It was the unavoidable result of physical weakness, and a deep mental struggle.

Soon after her return to the Grange, she received a letter from Colonel Ashurst. It was calmer than what he had previously written, though breathing the most exquisite tenderness. He said it was a last appeal. He felt she did not love him; he had deceived himself. It was his part to implore her pardon, yet was she still resolved to wrench from him and herself too, the greatest happiness? Finally, he would remain in London, whence his letter was dated, for a week, by which time, if he received no reply, he would conclude her decision to be irrevocable, and proceed abroad, he knew not where, but he would never cross her path again.

This letter Madeline read and re-read; at one moment she crushed it in scorn of the sophistry her clear intelligence detected, the next pressed her lips to the loving words, which found too ready an echo in her heart. He asked her for happiness, and in return for that would rob her of her social standing, ay! unfit her ever again to take her place among her equals, humble though they were. Not, indeed, that she had much to renounce, tossed, as she had been from childhood, hither and thither by the icy currents of enforced charity. Even a stranger, like Jessie's coarse-minded husband, thought himself entitled to give her advice, and rend the veil with which general consent wraps the delicate topics of love and marriage.

Still pride, or conscience, or some dim sense of striving to do well, came to her aid, and, with resolute lip and pallid cheek, she committed the oft-read letter to the flames, and then bitterly counted each day as it passed, till the allotted week was accomplished, sternly holding back her hand from pouring forth the burning, reproachful, tender thoughts, which welled up, like the quick springing waters of some deep-fed fountain! Not even to say "no" would she write—she knew the danger of continuing the correspondence.

But the Grange, and all in it, except Agnes, became insupportable to her. The restraint, the monotony, the dearth of sufficient occupation, the smooth littleness of the life, all seemed detestable to her unhinged mind, and she looked paler and thinner each day.

At last she determined to tender her resignation to Lady Templemore. Any defined prospect of escape from a place so fraught with painful associations would be a relief; and the wholesome effort to push her fortunes in some line more congenial than the unexciting routine of a resident governess's existence would probably prove a tonic to her spirit. Yet Madeline was not naturally a restless or a dissatisfied woman, but, for the present, the moral

harmony of her nature was broken into strange discords, therefore "she wandered through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none."

It was towards the close of November, a bright clear day, a light frost crisping the paths, and condensing the vapours on the distant lowlands into soft mist wreaths, over which the towers of Greybridge rose with a sort of unreal beauty, as though suspended in mid-air. Lady Templemore was starting with her eldest daughter to pay a visit at some distance, and Lady Agnes had been invited by her father to accompany him on horseback, a joyful summons to his daughter.

"Oh! Miss Digby," cried Lady Templemore, coming hastily into the school-room, "will you be so good as to take this note to the vicarage. It is a nice walk, and then Mrs. Wray can tell you all about those poor people, the Prices, who applied to me yesterday. I do not like to do anything more till the case is inquired into; your seeing Mrs. Wray will do just as well as me, and save me an hour."

"I will attend to it," said Madeline, and when the sound of hoofs and wheels had died away, she put on her walking things, and started on the errand.

The vicarage was on the edge of the grounds, but down the hill, in an opposite direction to the old castle, the scene of so much joy and sorrow, and stamped with such chequered lights on Madeline's memory, never, never more to be effaced. The fresh, clear air braced Madeline's nerves, as, with light, quick step, she walked to the vicarage.

Her way led through a belt of plantation, across a bare pasture-field, and finally through a wood, the boundary of Lord Templemore's grounds at that side.

The vicar's wife was at home, and a long discussion, on the merits of the poor people in question, followed the perusal of Lady Templemore's note; but, at last, charged with divers and sundry messages, Madeline set out on her homeward way.

The day was still beautiful, and, pleased to be alone, she took a different path from that by which she came, intending to prolong her ramble and enjoy the early sunset, gleaming with its gold, and violet, and crimson, against the tall, straight stems of the beech-trees, and the lace-like tracery of the leafless elms.

She should have liked Jessie Moorcroft as a companion to enjoy it with her, but scarcely as Mrs. Downing, for she knew her friend's mind was hardly ever free enough now from the incubus of the elegant Arthur—his claims and rights—to permit light-hearted enjoyment. And herself! How curious that she should be so much alone. No tie—none that she could call her own! She had met much friendliness, but little individual attachment. Her aunt

she had hoped and expected to love and regard as a mother, and now, looking back, how clearly she saw that had that pleasant and astute personage been spared for a longer period, it would but have led to estrangement with increasing knowledge of her character: her grandmother was simply an object of aversion: and of the various people with whom she had been brought in contact, her heart warmed most at the memory of poor Kit and Mrs. Fitzwarrenne, and the much-enduring, kindly, weakly Miss Foster. "Strange, indeed," she murmured, almost aloud, "that I have none to love, and none to love me!" A quick, firm tread caught her ear, and the next moment a hand was laid upon her arm, and a voice said "Madeline!" A voice!—*the* voice, rather—the voice that struck the inner chords of her heart with such responsive power! Some unaccountable change passed over her spirit; first a wild, unreasoning joy shivered through her, and a sort of reckless determination to enjoy the present moment succeeded, lending her a strange daring—a sense of power, that made her suddenly resolve to show this proud man, who, in spite of reason and conscience, she passionately loved, glimpses of the heaven she knew she could bestow, and then withhold it, or not! "Shall you have the power?" asked conscience; "fire is a dangerous plaything." "Time will show," was the answer of the dauntless something which had got the mastery over her. And all this ebbed and flowed through her brain before the deep-toned music in which her name was uttered had died away. "You here, Colonel Ashurst?" she replied, without pausing, and turning her head away to hide the joy she knew was beaming and sparkling in "eye, lip, and cheek."

"Yes, Madeline; and you are not surprised? You must have felt I could not leave England without seeing you—without trying to overcome your objections to be happy, and to bestow happiness."

"Hush!" said Madeline, with a pretty imperative gesture of her little hand. "Do not vex me with the subject again. I have been frank. I have shown you my real mind—its doubts and weakness; and I tell you, you may tempt, but you cannot blind me!"

"I do not wish to blind you, Madeline—*my* Madeline, for you are mine in heart; rather should I wish that you understood fully all that might spring from my proposal, and then you would see how great the gain, how few the drawbacks! Who is there to love or cherish you, dearest? Who cares for you, dear as you ought to be? Who recognises the rarity of the gem, because the setting is poor and dull? To me you are the one great good of life; I cannot look forward without you. To me without you, there is nothing."

"At present!" said Madeline, with sad emphasis, and raising her eyes to his, yet smiling, as though mocking his professions. "Yes, at present I am a good—an unattainable good—and therefore to be coveted. Ah, Colonel Ashurst! how long would the intrinsic value of the gem counterbalance its faults of setting, once it was yours? How long would it be before some other unattainable good might supplant that for which you now pine? Leave me in peace, and think!"

"Madeline," interrupted Ashurst, "I cannot, of course, answer such objections as these: they are plausible. I can but say that I feel for you what I have never felt before. There is a charm for me in your every tone, and look, and gesture. More than this, I am much your senior. I have seen much of life, and tasted the bitterness of satiety—you give me back something of youth, and faith, and enthusiasm! I dare not openly, avowedly, link myself with you. But do you therefore think I would love you less truly, tenderly, constantly, than if we were legally tied to each other? Do you imagine that men are faithful and devoted to their wives only? You have known little of reality if you do! No; you must listen to me," for she tried to speak. "Hear me out, and then I will hear you. The real marriage is constancy—that sympathy which makes separation death. You might be my wife by all the rites of law and religion, and yet a gulf between us! you might be but a beloved companion, and indissolubly linked to me for ever! With me ever at your side, my respectful affection visible to all, your future provided for, your grace and ability rendering my house and table doubly attractive to those men of literary and political power, which, with ambition once more kindled through your sympathy, I would collect about me, loving and loved, what a life offers itself to you, Madeline! How strong a contrast to what you would choose! How cold, how isolated your lot would be! And it is not yourself alone whom you would thus sacrifice. Rejected by you, I feel I shall never reach to the position I might otherwise attain. I shall again sink into the apathetic distrust—the careless, fatal *cui bono*-strain of mind and feeling from which my love for you has roused me. And I love you, Madeline! I love you!" He stopped abruptly, as if language could help him no more, and all eloquence was exhausted in the passionate, half-smothered cry, "I love you!"

"Oh, heavens!" cried Madeline, deeply moved, "how shall I answer you! My way is indeed lonely and sad, but that my love can be of such importance to you I cannot believe. You, a great gentleman, with all the privileges and responsibilities of rank, wanting the love and companionship of a poor girl like me to make you act your part in life. No, Colonel Ashurst, I cannot believe it! I know well that you are far above me, too far, to

think of me as a wife. My ignorance is not so great as to leave me in doubt on this point. I neither ask nor accept so great an elevation," a slight smile curling her tremulous sensitive lips, "but I *do* ask that you will not think of me at all! Not," she continued, turning her face fully to him, her large dark eyes deepening, even enlarging with the strong emotion stirring her pulses so wildly, "Not that you overrate me, or what I might be to the man I loved, or *let* myself love! I know I could be his loving, capable friend—his faithful confidant, the intelligent worker out of his details; and I feel, too, that besides the higher companionship, I could sweeten his weary moments with tenderness, such as strength only can give. Colonel Ashurst, I seem to recognise myself at this moment for the first time, and know all I could be to the man I could love, and—and," she turned deadly pale, "your picture is a tempting one, it is! and what have I to look at as opposed to it! Toil, loneliness, perhaps poverty; no beauty, or elegance, or love. I see it all stronger and clearer than you can paint it, and I have none of the tender scruples which grow up in the sweet, warm atmosphere of home. I am a waif and a stray, yet—yet—I must not do this thing."

There was inexpressible pathos and dignity in her voice and manner, and though her words struck like electric currents through Ashurst's veins, he was silent, collecting himself for one more effort, and fancying he saw signs of capitulation. He was probably sincere in much that he said—men so readily mistake a dominant fancy for a real want; moreover, his enthusiastic exaggerations must, he thought, help him with a girl so peculiar and intellectually proud as Madeline. He had not given her credit for so much fire, and thought her simply a gentle, graceful, loving girl, with more brains than usual. They had continued to advance while speaking, and now reached a fence, crossed by a stile, consisting of three steps. Ashurst went first, and turned to assist his companion, but either she was shaken by her emotion, or the slight frost had made the stones unsafe, her foot slipped, and she would have fallen forward had not Ashurst caught her. Naturally, irresistibly, he held the fair, slight form to his heart, and, to his delighted surprise, her slender arms softly, tenderly, pressed him in return. Nor were the lips withheld from his, but with an upward look—a prayerful expression, as if imploring aid from some invisible power, beaming from the liquid depths of her dark eyes—Madeline gently returned his embrace, which some undefined feeling had rendered less passionate than he himself anticipated. The next instant, extricating herself from his arms, and flushing all over for a moment, she exclaimed in a broken tone—

"Enough; I could not refuse the first loving arms held out to me since my poor father's dying clasp! I have never known the

kiss of affection since, and yours may be but seeming, yet it is sweet." And she stood apart a moment, her hands clasped, and lost in thought, and Ashurst, the bold lover, the assured man of the world, the disbeliever in woman's truth or reality, stood silent and bewildered beside her.

It was but for a moment. Recovering himself, he took her hand with an air of the tenderest respect, and softening his voice to its most insinuating cadence—

"Now Madeline,—beloved, best!—you will no longer condemn yourself and me to separation and misery."

"Do not speak more to me now," returned Madeline, in low and hesitating tones. "Leave me, for I am too near the Grange to allow of your accompanying me further, and I want to be alone. I implore of you not to speak more to me to-day." There was so much entreaty in her voice, that Ashurst thought it wiser to comply.

"I obey," he said; "but I will write to you to-night, and before I leave you, promise me you will consider my letter, and reply."

"Yes," returned Madeline slowly and dreamily, "I will consider and reply."

"Good-bye, then, for a day or two. Ah! Madeline, if you could but know how fondly I love you. Adieu, dearest!"

He stood looking after her for a few moments, tempted—strangely tempted—to hasten to overtake her, to exclaim—

"You are worthy a better man than me. Deign to be my wife—mine, in the face of all."

But worldly wisdom rose up, and rebuked the heart's impulse. Had he ever found any woman worth a sacrifice! and though this was an exquisite specimen of the pleasant toy, was he not deceiving himself as usual. Besides, it was no real downfall for a little governess to become the petted mistress of Dudley Ashurst, provided for for life. He was not a man to let a woman he had ever fancied, want. Above all, she had promised to consider, and "She who deliberates is lost," he muttered to himself, as he retraced his steps towards the loneliness of Trevallon.

The next mid-day's post brought two letters for Madeline, one of which she put in her pocket to be read when alone. The second she opened at once, for it was addressed in Miss Foster's nervous spidery writing, and ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR MADELINE,

"It is so long since you have written, that I should have been quite uneasy if I had not met Mrs. Moorcroft by the merest accident about three weeks ago at Piccadilly Circus, where we were both waiting for an omnibus. I should never have known

her if she had not stopped me. She told me how well her daughter had married, very nice and satisfactory, I am sure. She also said you had been ill, and had been staying with Mrs. —— (I forget the daughter's name); and she was so pleased to see you, though she feared from all accounts you were rather spoiled at Lady Templemore's.

"Now, my dear Madeline, pray excuse me, but I fear you have too much of a spirit for your own good. It was such a pity you contradicted your dear grandmamma about that poor young Mr. Moorcroft. Mr. John says he is quite a rising man, taken into partnership in some large commission firm; though, to be sure, if you did not really like him, I suppose you were right; but you might have tried, you know. And this brings me to the object of my letter; but, first, I ought to mention, that I told your grandmamma of Mrs. Moorcroft's news, and how you were a great favourite of Lady Templemore's (of course I said nothing about your being spoiled, that would never do). She just gave a little grunt; you know the sort of grunt, very expressive, but I do not know exactly what it meant on this occasion. However, she did not seem angry, so I asked her if I might write and tell you the news. She said I might, if I chose. You see I think it would be a nice opportunity for you to write and wish her joy. You will, I am sure, be delighted to hear that Mrs. John Redman has presented your uncle with a son and heir, one of the sweetest babies you ever saw, with quite a head of black hair. He was christened last Wednesday, 'John Thomas,' after his father and grandfather. Mrs. Redman was much pleased, and sent me to buy a hood for the sweet infant, and I got a beauty at Capper and Moon's—such a bargain, because there was just a tiny dust-mark or two on the side, which I quite hid with a few more loops to the rosette. Now I have told you all my news; and I hope you will write soon, either to me or to your dear grandmamma, it is such a good opportunity. And I trust, dear Madeline, you will not be carried away by the fine people you are with, for I am sure your grandmamma is your real friend, and sincerely attached to you, though she conceals it. I should greatly like to have a nice long talk with you, for somehow I have not felt strong of late, and get foolishly low and nervous, which is very weak, of course. But I am taking a preparation of herbs, ninepence a packet, and it makes a bottleful, which lasts a fortnight, much cheaper than a doctor, and highly recommended in the advertisement. Do write me a long letter, and believe me,

"Ever your affectionate friend,

"CECILIA FOSTER."

"Poor Miss Foster! How dreadful to be low and weak in the

house with my 'dear grandmamma,'" thought Madeline, her eyes moist at the idea of the kindly helpless creature sinking under a rule so eminently calculated to "break the bruised reed." "I wish she could leave, that she had any retreat. It is so cruel to see the rich and the strong devouring the lives they ought to cherish and befriend. I must write to her, but first——" Her thoughts here ceased to be coherent, and she grasped her unopened letter; first, that must be considered and replied to.

The day over, the last good-night exchanged with Lady Agnes, Madeline locked herself into her pretty bedroom; a bright fire glowed in the grate, and all looked neat and cheerful. She put her candle on the dressing-table, and looked steadily at the reflection of her own face in the glass. It was deadly pale; her eyes had a strained expression, and looked haggard from the dark shade below them. "What beauty does he see here?" she muttered; and then, throwing herself into an arm chair, she drew forth and opened Dudley Ashurst's letter.

It was well written,—passionate, tender, explicit. It promised provision for life, and then repeated much of his arguments of the previous day. Madeline read it through with a set brow, sometimes pressing her lip till the blood nearly sprang under the small white teeth; then she let the hand that held it drop, and thought intently. Again she read it, and threw it from her, burying her face in her hands. What lay before her? A youth of toil, a lonely old age; perhaps, like poor Miss Foster, without a refuge from the icy despotism of circumstance. A life without love! Oh! what had she done to be so desolate! And then, who was there to suffer by her acceding to Ashurst's prayer? No loving mother, no proud father to be degraded by her act. What were social claims or laws to one who had only suffered from their pressure? They might be all very beneficial to certain classes, but hers was an exceptional case, and to her they were oppressive barriers, not protective lines, rather keeping her out in the wilderness, than sheltering her in the fold! And then, the oscillations of her religious training had left her sadly denuded of those wholesome spiritual restraints which have been as a tower of strength to many a weaker woman. Wearied with the gloomy, unreasoning puritanism of her Clapham school, then cloyed with the sugar and water insipidity, the over-done glitter and seductiveness of the well-meaning ladies of the Annonciades, Madeline had small chance of a fixed religious belief; and it never occurred to her that living with Dudley Ashurst as his wife without marriage would be displeasing to the Great Ruler of the universe.

Yet she was not without religious tendencies, no mind of a high stamp is; but the altar of her heart might justly have been inscribed, like the Athenian altar of old, "To the unknown God,"

whom she ignorantly worshipped. Nevertheless, she now raised her heart to Him: "Send me strength and wisdom," she ejaculated. Why should she turn from the delightful picture of the future painted for her by Dudley's pen. Surely so much of good more than counter-balanced the evils attendant upon it. Oh! the joy of yielding! The bright companionship, the love, the beauty, the refinement of her life with Ashurst! How glorious it would all be! No longer compelled to study her utterances, lest her bolder views might disturb the orthodox routine of her associates' thoughts; no longer obliged to accept gratefully the crumbs of courtesy which fell from rich men's tables, but sit at a continual feast of observance and love spread for her alone. And Ashurst himself. Though she affected to treat as exaggerated his picture of all she might be to him, she felt there was more of truth in it than perhaps he himself thought. Then the absence of care or thought for the future!

It was a mighty temptation, and the reverse of the picture was so chilling. Once more she took up Ashurst's letter, and re-perused it, her tears, large heavy drops, "like the first of a thunder shower," fell upon the paper. Then she opened her writing-book, set the paper in order, and walked up and down the room. "I have more to gain than to lose," she murmured, "there will be none to mourn my fall, as it will be called." She paused by the writing-table, the die was almost cast, she thought of the words in which she might best express her agreement to his proposal. Suddenly, as though a veil had been raised, her father's deathbed was before her, his inarticulate blessing sounded in her ears, "God guard my child!" she stopped short in her walk, and thrust back the disordered masses of her hair;—free as she was from home-bred scruples, there was an undefined something within her which forbade the unsanctified union—a small voice, which whispered in stilly, penetrating accents, "Make the wrench now, do not wait until months, perhaps years of companionship make it a thousand times harder and more deadly, for the wrench must come, sooner or later."

"God give me strength and wisdom," she ejaculated, and then the tide turned, she was herself once more, but feverish, eager to decide her fate. She seized the pen, and on the sheet destined for such different expressions, rapidly traced the following words:—

"COLONEL ASHURST,

"I have considered—and I have decided—better part now than hereafter, when it would cost you less and me more. This is my last word. I have fought with my own weakness, which was a harder task than to resist your temptations, much as I could have

loved you, and I have conquered. I am not high enough to be your wife. I am worthy of better things than to be your mistress! Farewell."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE Christmas festivities were nearly over at Abingdon Villas, and a mere handful of mince-meat left at the bottom of the jar, nevertheless the parlour of No. 13 was decked for reception, and not the parlour only, but wonderful to relate, a fire was being lighted in the drawing-room, and the covers of that sacred apartment were being removed. Miss Foster and Sarah had been hard at work all day, for Mrs. Redman was to entertain at tea and supper that evening not only Mr. and Mrs. Comerford, Miss Comerford, and sundry young Comerfords, but Mr. and Mrs. John Redman, which was the cause of much extra preparation.

In fact the entrance of the last-named personage (and a personage she was determined to be) into the ranks of the Redman family had considerably troubled the tranquil waters of their existence.

She was a large, handsome, florid woman, on the remote side of thirty, with large brown eyes, and thick brown hair, and a "fine bust" rather than a good figure. She was a well-dressed showy woman, liking parties to the theatre, or the opera, with a good substantial supper and lots of champagne to conclude; and parties to the Crystal Palace, and to races, and generally to everything suggestive of a party. And she talked loudly and frankly to men of all kinds, and was herself generally denominated "a very jolly woman" by her admirers, who had always been numerous. Her training from her youth up had prepared and fitted her to sustain such a reputation. She was the daughter of a jolly quartermaster of a jolly regiment, and she had been for several years a real and valuable helpmate to the favourite medical man in a small sea-side town, where her popular manners, and appetising little suppers, had wholesomely corrected the effects of the doctor's nauseous draughts and staggering accounts.

The doctor died, and the interesting widow came to town about some business connected with the will of her late husband. As she placed the matter in the hands of Messrs. Harridge and Blyth, that eminent firm of Chancery Lane, she was frequently asked to the house of the junior partner, whose acquaintance (and that of his wife) she had made during their summer visit to Rockville-super-Mare, a couple of years previously. There she met the redoubted "Mr. John," who was speedily fascinated by her full-

blown charms, and easy elegance. In short he was carried away captive, almost before he knew it, and though the lady had the reputation of having a pretty little fortune of her own, the particulars concerning it could never be ascertained either from her lawyer or her husband, much to old Mrs. Redman's mortification. Between these rival personages a species of guerilla warfare soon sprung up, in which Mrs. John had much the best of it, for she had the good temper generally possessed by persons of robust health, first-rate digestion, a thick moral skin, and high animal spirits. Mrs. Redman's conjectures respecting her money fluctuated according to the degree of offence or conciliation offered by her daughter-in-law, who had a provoking way of never seeming to give the matter a thought.

"I wish you would have another pair of candles put on the cabinet," said Mrs. Redman querulously to her companion, as she entered the drawing-room in a cap of extra size and complications, and a thick black satin, just before the hour at which the company were to assemble. "Where is the use of promising to see to everything when you leave me to think of most of them? I shall have Mrs. John complaining she can't see our faces when she comes. I say she can never have had much money of her own to take care of or she would not be so careless of other people's. I'm sure the extravagance of that house," meaning the very comfortable tenement rented by Mr. John, "is enough to—to make one ill; though for all the hints and advice I give John he never lets out what she had, no, not to save one from bursting of curiosity. Well, I hope he may not repent it! forcing one to sit up here out of the usual way; uncovering everything, as if the parlour was not good enough."

"But then the drawing-room is so pretty and cheerful, dear Mrs. Redman," urged poor Miss Foster; "and, after all, what is the use of keeping it shut up?"

"There! you are just like the rest; using her very words, I declare. The folly and waste that that woman has introduced! There, there's the front door bell. Just run and see that the candles are lighted in the spare room. I daresay it's Miss Nettlethorp; she is always early." And poor weary Miss Foster, her heart beating far too fast at every sudden word or sound, went hastily upstairs.

The rings now became frequent, and soon the party was nearly all assembled.

Several of Mrs. Redman's most esteemed neighbours, who were habitually admitted to the honour of a hand at cribbage or "spoil five" with the amiable hostess, persons of severe aspect and irreproachable respectability, were added to the family circle. They were principally old maids or widows, with the exception of a

retired East Indian, considered a very courtly personage, and a stockbroker, also retired from business, with his wife, and, strange to see at an Abingdon Villa *soirée*, a son, a young and rather good-looking man, whom the mother had the day before, with much solemnity, asked leave to bring to the hospitable mansion of Mrs. Redman.

Nearly all were assembled, and the business of the evening had commenced by the appearance of large trays bearing tea, coffee, cake, &c., *selon les règles*, carried by Sarah, in such a dainty cap; and *the* greengrocer of the neighbourhood, a man of the highest reputation as a purveyor of vegetables, and as a waiter. In short, he was looked upon as a perfect and confidential master of the ceremonies by the "ladies of the vicinity," as he would have termed them. There was an aristocratic air about him that was irresistible, and to hear him gravely ask your name as you removed your cloak, in order to announce it, as if you had never bought a shilling's worth of potatoes and three-pennyworth of greens from him, had a courtly flavour about it truly imposing. The commencement of such a gathering is in general difficult, not to say depressing. No one appears to have anything to say or to do. The jingle of a tea-spoon falling is a relief. So in this case the gentlemen gathered at the end of the room, and conversed in a low tone at long intervals about the last telegrams and the curious *exposé* of the latest limited company, while the ladies sipped their tea and nibbled the bits of cake which lay upon their saucers in default of plate or table. Poor Miss Foster felt it oppressive, and that in some mysterious manner she would be held accountable for failure, for hers was no limited liability, poor soul! She made a sort of convulsive attempt to go round and speak to the ladies, and, if she could, manœuvre young Mr. Compton into the centre of the party. He had just stepped forward to relieve Miss Comerford of her teacup, with a boldness and address never to be sufficiently admired, when a loud ring announced the missing guests and gave a pleasant sensation of sound and movement to the hearers.

The entrance of Mr. and Mrs. John Redman created quite a sensation. He was as well dressed as ever, the side parting of his hair as clearly defined, the wave over to the left side and into a curl as full and well arranged; his voice, too, was still pompous and sonorous. Yet a change had passed upon the man, an undefinable something had gone out of him. Mrs. Redman was looking splendid, in a blue moire, with a great deal of blonde lace about the shoulders, and a vast display of "bust," white enough, but somewhat too plump; and she had a piece of black velvet round her throat with a diamond brooch in it, and very long streamers behind. Then her hair was dressed in a most intricate

manner, and decorated with a complicated contrivance of scarlet velvet and gold. And she had a scarlet fan with gold sticks, and a few inches of pocket-handkerchief with miles of lace round it; with a great variety of bracelets, with lockets and crosses, and miscellaneous bunches of charms dependent therefrom, which made an incessant jingle when she shook hands, or fanned herself and stirred her tea. Mr. and Mrs. John entered arm in arm, but immediately separated, "madame" at once shaking hands with Miss Foster, then with Mrs. Comerford, and sweeping her way to the lady of the house, with a running fire of remarks in a clear ringing voice. "Shocked to be so late, Miss Foster. How do, Susan? Well, grandma'! how are you this cold weather? The skating was great fun to-day. Mrs. Blyth and I were nearly two hours by the Serpentine to-day, and as we were returning I stumbled on an old friend of mine, Captain Hawkshaw; so I carried him home to dinner, and that made us a little late. I would have brought him here, too, only he was engaged to a supper at Evans's with one or two brother officers. Thank you," to the ex-East Indian, who advanced a chair for her accommodation; "much obliged. Oh, dear me! I have disturbed you I am sure."

"Will you have some tea?" asked Mrs. Redman, stiffly. "I will order some to be made; you are so late, the first lot is all cold."

"Oh, then, I think I must trouble you," returned the daughter-in-law, with a sort of fat laugh that shook her shoulders, adding, with an arch look at the East Indian, "I was sworn at Highgate, and always avoid cold tea if I can get it hot."

"Coldness of any kind must be a stranger to *your* experience," returned that accomplished individual, with a courtly bow.

Mrs. John spread out her fan and made believe to hide her face, exclaiming: "'Pon my word, one doesn't hear such speeches as that in Abingdon Villas every day. Why, grandma', you must present this gentleman to me."

"Introduce him, I suppose you mean?" returned grandma', with a cold dissonance in her voice, as if the chords of her nature were being stretched beyond harmony or endurance. "Mr. Lavington, Mrs. John Redman;" whereupon Mr. L. repeated his courtly bow, and Mrs. John made an upward and forward movement of her massive shoulders, and almost immediately after electrified the company, and completed her mother-in-law's disgust, by calling in audible tones, and with an air of command, to her husband—"John, come here! Just get my cloak! I am all of a shiver. I am sure, grandma', you'll take your death of cold if you don't try and warm this room better; it's—oh, law! it's several degrees below zero!—What do you say, Mr. Lavington?"

"There is, undoubtedly, a deficiency of caloric," returned that

gentleman; and the irate hostess felt as if the fact had been proclaimed trumpet-tongued:—

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Mrs. Redman, of No. 13, Abingdon Villas, never lights her drawing-room fire except when she has company, and can't help it."

In a humbler and less artificial sphere of life, she might have given her daughter-in-law a black eye, or thrown vitriol over her, or otherwise relieved her feelings, after the fashion of sensitive matrons in Whitechapel or St. Giles's; as it was, she contented herself by beckoning Miss Foster, with an imperative gesture, from an amiable effort to entertain Miss Comerford and Mr. Compton with a book of prints—stale, but not ancient. "Why don't you get out the cards, or do something, instead of meandering about in that ridiculous way. I will have more coals put on," she added, in her most acute accents; "you've just perished every one, never lighting the fire till seven o'clock."

"Why, Mrs. Redman," began the astonished Miss Foster, conscious of the direct orders she had received on that head.

"There! don't talk," interrupted her mistress. "Get me a cup of hot tea. Here's your tea, Mrs. John," she continued, to that lady, who was absorbed in an animated conversation with Mr. Lavington, accompanied by much tossing up and down of her head, opening and shutting of her fan, shaking and shrugging of her shoulders;—"and what's this?" pursued Mrs. Redman, taking up a letter that lay on the tea-tray. "Oh! it's for you," handing it to Miss Foster. "I'm sure the time you must spend reading letters, to say nothing of answering them, or the money spent in stamps, would earn you a fortune, if you were inclined." (Mrs. Redman always condemned poor people as though some moral obliquity of personal choice only kept them back from riches.)

"Dear, dear!" returned Miss Foster, brightening up in spite of her mistress's disapprobation. "It is from Madeline. I am so glad."

"Hum," said Mrs. Redman. "You had better put it in your pocket and mind your business at present."

Miss Foster obeyed, and was soon after to be seen 'meandering' about the room with a pack of cards in her hand, trying to make up a whist-table; and then Mrs. John, having got her scarlet and gold opera cloak, and wrapped it with ostentatious care around her; and sundry cups of tea, with cake *ad libitum*, proposed a round game—"*ving toon*," as she suggested; and challenged Mr. Lavington to play thereat, and so depriving Mrs. Redman of her favourite partner at whist. "He do play so steady," she was wont to say, "and is always the gentleman, whatever way the tricks go."

"Then you are not for whist this evening?" she observed, in her most acidulated voice.

"No!" replied Mrs. John for him, "he is going to join the young people *this* evening, but John will make up your table, he plays a tolerable game. Here John! John! you are wanted; whist with your mother."

Again "that tone of command as if he was her servant—her foot-boy," thought the aggravated old lady. "John here, John there, John plays a tolerable game, indeed." He whose dictum had ever been accepted as an irreversible fiat by the card players of Abingdon Villas. What horrible spell had this woman of uncertain property wrought upon them?

The whist players settled with due gravity to their solemn amusement, and Mrs. John, with much noise and laughter, settled all about counters, and lives, and stakes, and the pool, and had it all her own way; moreover, she sat between Mr. Lavington and young Mr. Compton, and fascinated both; though Miss Comerford, in an elegant white tarlatan spotted with blue, sat at the other side of Mr. Compton in a condition of the greatest mildness and refinement, she barely received the civilities of polite society, while the jovial ex-widow, by her little agreeable off-hand flatteries and lively sallies, absorbed every one's attention. "Quite disgraceful, indeed!" as Miss Nettlethorp—who sat opposite her with a momentarily increasing severity of aspect, losing three and fourpence without receiving the slightest commiseration—observed the next day to Mrs. Compton. "Too bad; a woman like that, quite middle-aged, to set herself up against a nice, modest, lady-like girl such as Miss Comerford; and she that had had a double allowance of matrimony too!"

However, Mrs. John little recked of opinion so long as she could amuse herself without injuring her own prospects in any way, and amid many exclamations of joy or despair as the game fluctuated, she kept herself the centre of public notice till old Mrs. Redman, aggravated beyond endurance, despatched Miss Foster prematurely to see if supper was ready.

At that repast it boots not to tell how Miss Comerford nibbled genteelly at a microscopic sandwich, and delicately spooned up a little raspberry cream, when any one was at leisure to give her some, and Mrs. Comerford was also fain to be thankful for what chance threw in her way, while all the male portion of the guests seemed absorbed in the agreeable task of administering to the wants of Mrs. John.

All things, however, come to an end, and as the guests not belonging to the family circle departed, Mr. John and Mr. Comerford appeared to have settled down into a most interesting conversation, in which the words "early applications for shares," "no second call contemplated," "a first-rate board of directors," might be caught at intervals.

"It is very cold and raw to-night," said Mrs. Redman, with a certain sense of relief as her guests disappeared. "Ring the bell, Miss Foster. I feel a sort of a shiver. I had better have a little hot brandy-and-water before I go to bed;" this last was a gentle hint to Mrs. John, who had drawn a chair to the fire and was warming her feet on the fender. "An excellent idea, grandma'," was the cool reply, "and we'll join you," a suggestion no one negatived.

"You had better open your letter and see what that girl has to say for herself," said grandmamma, pouncing on Miss Foster in revenge, and not knowing that a tolerably brisk correspondence had existed of late between her granddaughter and the companion. Poor Miss Foster coloured and fidgeted, she did not know what might be in the letter, and dared not read it aloud, nor yet refuse. "Come," said Mrs. Redman, "tell us what it's about."

"Why, we haven't heard anything of Madeline since she refused young Moorcroft, like a little fool as she was," said Mr. John, rising and coming up to the fire-place. "What has become of her?"

Thus urged, Miss Foster could no longer hesitate, and proceeded to open the envelope. As she unfolded its contents, a scrap of newspaper fell to the floor, which Mr. John picked up and held, while Miss Foster skimmed the epistle.

"She is quite well, and—oh, dear me! where is it?" said the lecturer, suddenly interrupting herself, and looking down and around her.

"Here," said Mr. John, handing her the bit of newspaper.

"Oh, thank you. She is quite well, and hopes Mrs. Redman is quite well. They are having very little company at the Grange, this Christmas, for Lord Templemore has lost an aunt, and Lady Templemore seems to be acting very kind, and there is nothing more worth mentioning."

"What is that piece of newspaper for?" asked Mrs. Redman, in awful accents.

"Oh, only an advertisement she wants me to inquire about."

"An advertisement!" repeated Mrs. Redman. "I'll engage she's going to leave her situation—turned away probably—and you are both trying to deceive me about it. The worthlessness and ingratitude of that girl is past belief, and you are nearly as bad."

"No, ma'am. Pray do not say so," cried Miss Foster, fairly run to ground. "She is going to leave Lady Templemore, but at her own desire. The place does not agree with her, and she wishes to get music pupils. Lady Templemore is very sorry to lose her; but you see, after having been so ill, she made up her mind to leave, and now lady Templemore has found a lady to fill her place, so she is coming to town immediately."

"So you have been corresponding unknown, you deceitful creature. She is coming to town, is she? but she shan't come here, I can tell you! Let her provide for herself, as she said she would; and scorned my advice the last time I set eyes on her, not seven months ago. She'll find it a hard matter to make both ends meet in London, without help, and she needn't look for it from me. Mark my words, Madeline Digby will come to no good. It is not likely one of her name ever should."

"Who is Madeline Digby, and what is it all about?" asked Mrs. John, leaning back in her chair.

Whereupon Mr. Redman and his mother opened a sort of *duo*, in which Mrs. Comerford occasionally joined, and poor Miss Foster threw in a deprecatory word or two, completing the confusion. However, Mrs. John, with a degree of acumen highly creditable to her intellectual powers, managed to trace the leading facts, and also to discern (which was less difficult) the bias of her mother-in-law's mind. This decided *her* view of the case.

"Well, it *is* funny I never heard this story before," she said. "How sly of you, John, to keep it so quiet! Law, my dear, no man need be ashamed of having poor relations—everyone has some, and this girl seems a plucky one. Come, grandma', I think you'd better take her in and do for her," and Mrs. John winked the eye furthest from her mother-in-law, at the astonished and terrified Mrs. Comerford.

"Oh, you do, do you?" said the amiable grandma'. "Did I ask your opinion? Perhaps you'd better take her in yourself, ma'am."

"I don't care if I do," returned Mrs. John, with careless magnificence. "Of course any relation of John's is welcome to me."

"But she's not like a relation. She is a sort of an impostor forced upon us; and as for you, you are glad of an excuse to spend money any way," exclaimed Mrs. Redman, provoked out of the caution which usually marked her intercourse with Mrs. John, whose standing, in her estimation, represented an "unknown quantity," and was best let alone.

"Oh, my goodness! just listen to that, John!" ejaculated his wife, with perfect good humour. "There's a libel."

"My dear," cried Mrs. Comerford, anxious to throw oil on the troubled waters, "you little know the grief and annoyance mother has had with Madeline, without receiving much gratitude in return, I must say."

"She's self-willed, certainly; but not a bad sort of girl," observed Mr. John.

"And she doesn't want or expect to come here at all," put in Miss Foster.

"Well, I must say it is an extraordinary way to treat a parent and a benefactor (glaring at Miss Foster) in her own house, and partaking of her hospitality, to contradict and brow-beat her about—a creature that would be in the workhouse but for my charity," cried Mrs. Redman, her huge cap trembling with the fury of the wearer. "I don't know what she means writing to you, if she didn't want to get in here."

"If you would just listen, dear Mrs. Redman," urged Miss Foster, in her most persuasive accents, feeling herself guilty, however involuntarily, of having thrown down the apple of discord. "You see she sends me this bit of newspaper—an advertisement—from a lady's school, for a resident music teacher, to receive board and lodging in exchange for lessons three times a week, with the power to take out-of-door pupils, and asks me to make enquiries for her the first day you can spare me."

"And if you do anything of the kind, you leave my house," cried Mrs. Redman; "so just choose between me and her. Such impertinence! Sending you on errands, when she knows how she and I parted. It just shows she feels sure of *you*, and that you would throw me over for her. 'Birds of a feather!' You always took her part; but now mind what you are about. If I find you spending your time running after Miss Digby's errands, you had better leave my house."

"I'm sure I never thought you would be so vexed," stammered poor Miss Foster, with an hysterical choky feeling in her throat (she had been quite overtasked that day); but with a fixed resolve to do Madeline's bidding welling up in her kindly, weak, womanly heart, bound as it was to obedience by Madeline's few words of apology—"Excuse this trouble; but you are my only friend." To be necessary to any one—what new life and courage it lent the desolate companion; but her thoughts, "uttered or unexpressed," went for little in the Babel of excuses, explanations, and apologies which now arose. All, save Mrs. John, were eager to exonerate themselves from the indiscriminate blame lavished upon them by the "respectable Redman," and to soothe the somewhat unaccountable wrath of that venerable matron; ultimately she declared herself quite unable to partake of her brandy-and-water under such trying circumstances, so rang for Sarah, and, with a frozen and general "good-night," retired to her room, declining Miss Foster's aid.

"Well," cried Mrs. John, "for goodness sake, what was it all about? What set the old lady off? Why will she not allow her granddaughter to leave one place and look out for another, without going into a tantrum?"

"Hush! my dear Mrs. John," said Mrs. Comerford, eagerly, but in a subdued voice, "you don't know all the ins and outs. And

I must say it was rather injudicious of you, Miss Foster, to go and read that letter aloud."

This was a fortunate suggestion, and every one pounced upon it.

"Decided want of tact," said Mr. John; "raking up old sores."

"It was so unfortunate! for grandmamma was evidently uncomfortable all the evening;" observed Miss Comerford, mildly.

"And brought us all into disgrace, somehow," added her father.

"Why, how could I help it?" cried poor Miss Foster, on the verge of weeping. "Didn't she tell me?—did you not ask me, Mr. John?"

"What is the use of making ourselves uncomfortable?" said the audacious Mrs. John. "I vote——"

But her suggestions were cut short by the re-entrance of Sarah, who, addressing herself to Miss Foster, said, in the primmest of tones, "My missis would be glad if you could spare her the brandy; she thinks a little, with hot water, and a couple of cloves, might enable her to sleep."

She spoke as if Miss Foster was in the habit of consuming a bottleful every night; and seizing the one on the table, walked demurely off with it. Mrs. John looked after her, a little crest fallen; and, on Mrs. Comerford proposing (still in a subdued voice) that they should all go home, offered no opposition.

The party, therefore, broke up; all bidding Miss Foster good night in somewhat reproachful tones. How thankful she was when the front door closed on the last of them! But even still more so when Mrs. Redman refused to see her, alleging, as a reason, that she wanted to go to bed in peace, but requesting (through the door) that she would lock up the remains of the supper, and see the lights put out.

Weary as she was, and cold as was her "tower of refuge," *i.e.*, her bed-room, the lonely woman read over Madeline's letter before she laid down to rest.

"My dear Miss Foster,

"I have just had an interview with Lady Templemore, who tells me she has heard of a lady who will, she thinks, exactly suit her as a governess; and as we agreed, when I originally spoke to her, that I should wait her convenience, I am to leave whenever this lady can come to the Grange. Lady Templemore has acted with her usual justice; though evidently annoyed with me, at first, for leaving, now offers me a half-year's salary instead of a longer notice. I must, however, provide some place of abod', as I cannot go into lodgings alone. I therefore enclose you an advertisement, sent me by Mrs. Downing, some days back, and should feel greatly obliged by your calling at the address and inquiring

about it—what duties are expected, and if the place seems respectable, &c. Pray excuse this trouble; but you are my only friend! The sooner you can get this information the better, as my stay here is uncertain.

"How glad I shall be to see you, and have your kind sympathy in my plans (such as they are) for the future. I fear you are not well! How can you be well in Abingdon Villas, where the only ray of human kindly feeling is what warms your own heart!

"Well; though perhaps not worth much, believe in the sincere gratitude and affection of

"Yours,

"MADELINE DIGBY."

Miss Foster's tears fell thick and fast upon the letter—poor soul! It made her feel her loneliness more than she usually did. Her daily routine of oppression and slights, and moral blows; the sort of way each one seemed to look upon her as a harmless machine, which might be made use of, rather than a self-asserting fellow-creature, would never have drawn forth these tears. It was the unaccustomed word of affection and appreciation, giving a momentary glimpse of what she might and ought to be. Pleasure, too, had some share in these tears; she would soon see Madeline's fair young face, and feel her warm embrace. And if these strange feelings of sinking weakness—these oppressive heart-beatings—continued, Madeline would not leave her to die alone, with the perpetual ring of Mrs. Redman's grumblings, for the last earthly sounds in her weary ear. Yes! she would do Madeline's bidding if a dozen Mrs. Redmans threatened her! And though the companion might crouch before her mistress's rebukes, and be overcome at the disapproval of the august Mr. John, there were few dangers she would not have dauntlessly faced to do a service for the one being, in all the wilderness of life, who loved and trusted her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS FOSTER'S inquiries were satisfactorily answered, and about a fortnight after the scene last described, Madeline found herself installed in rather a dreary locality, and in a position widely different from that which she held with Lady Templemore.

Mrs. Williamson's "select establishment" was on a cheap scale, and the general tone not particularly refined. She was herself a small, querulous, but naturally kind woman, and was assisted by a daughter of the gushing sentimental order, who suffered from a

chronic, though unhappy, attachment to the curates who examined the young ladies in religion and theology. There was a variety of these gentlemen, as the curacy of St. Bride's, Notting Hill, changed hands frequently, but they nearly all produced the same effect on Miss Amelia Williamson. She was given to find confidants, too, among the older pupils and younger teachers. So that, upon the whole, though two better meaning, good natured women, than Mrs. and Miss Williamson could not be found, I should not have liked to send a daughter of mine to their select establishment. The moral atmosphere was scarce sufficiently bracing.

There were about twenty pupils, considerably crowded in a moderate sized edifice, dignified with the high-sounding appellation of "Leamington House." And the most difficult point in the agreement between Madeline and its mistress was the question of a separate bedroom; this, however, was finally balanced by "French conversation," and Madeline became temporarily the possessor of an apartment about fourteen feet square, where from her bed she could reach the washstand, the drawers, and the dressing-table, which two last were in this instance "one and indivisible."

The scramble, the jabber, the quarrels, and the confidences, seemed strange and bewildering after the repose, the order, the elegance of the house she had left. Moreover, she found her music lessons, three times a week, to fourteen or fifteen pupils, in various stages of progress, nearly all of them so imperfectly grounded that they had to unlearn as well as to acquire, a very wearisome and complete day's work, at the end of which she felt too stupid to do anything; nevertheless, in the intervening days, she enjoyed the unquestioned liberty with which she went in and out, Mrs Williamson never seeming to think she had the slightest responsibility regarding her teachers. Gradually Madeline was induced to give an hour or two in the morning, to hear French reading, for with all her good nature Mrs. Williamson knew how to extract the most work from her *employés*, though, to do her justice, it was not in a disagreeable way.

And how was our little heroine, after the fire and the storm! What comfort had she from the "still small voice?"

In truth not a great deal. Were conscience always clear and decided in its awards, we could scarce remain unconsoled for the resignation of any delight, however delightful. It is doubt in all cases, that is the real malicious devil. The question which arises, when the heroic exaltation of the struggle and the victory has passed, and the chill succeeds the glow, "What was it all for?" "Was all this self-denial and bitter renunciation necessary?" "What have I gained by it?"

And Madeline was peculiarly without defence against such whispers of Beelzebub.

She did not regret her decision, for hers was a strength springing from pure moral health, and from the clear sightedness of reason. Nevertheless, she did often dream of the joy and rapture of a life with Dudley Ashurst.

She had never seen or heard from him since their interview in the wood, but she had heard incidentally that he had left Trevallon, and it was reported had gone abroad. *That* page of her life was turned over and passed by for ever, and the present one seemed very blank, and colourless, and insipid. She walked wearily and mechanically through her days, yet not content with this loss of life, but by a wholesome instinct groping, almost involuntarily, for some reviving influence.

Her pupils offered small interest; to inspire them with any abstract love of any study whatever was simply impossible. Very few girls possess a nature sufficiently deep or strong to preserve the artistic tendency, even if originally in them, unquenched by the influence of the first ten years of their lives with the constant pressure of every circumstance in an adverse direction; while those in whom it might be developed are almost always trained in opposition, the prevailing opinion of orthodox Englishmen and women being, that all such leanings on the part of girls—love of art, in short, in any shape—is probably immoral, and at any rate decidedly bad.

Of the intense enjoyment, the enduring pleasure of a pursuit which cannot disappoint, and is apart from all exterior influence, few dream, or they would not wish to shut women out from what, in their still lives, is so supremely calculated to be a consolation and a support.

Madeline had been nearly a week with Mrs. Williamson, and had got into the full exercise of her duties agreed to, or imposed, and as yet she had seen or heard nothing of Miss Foster; this was a subject of some conjecture to her, as she had no idea that her grandmother could or would object to the companion's visit.

It was Tuesday afternoon, Madeline, a good deal tired after toiling through a succession of common-place music lessons, broken only by dinner, which was anything but a social meal, was arranging some music in the drawing-room, where she had been obliged to retire for the last two lessons, before the advance of the elocution, or calisthenic, or some other professor, who came to usurp the usual music-class room.

The drawing-room window looked out on a damp garden, where some pincushion-shaped beds and skeleton shrubs adorned a very dingy grass plot. The short January day was fast closing in, and the fire had burnt low; it was altogether a very cheerless

spot and house—just the time suitable for all kinds of useless regrets, and memory plied her busily with them. The day's work over, she had before her, tea with Mrs. Williamson, her daughter, and the English governess, at which meal there would be probably a discussion more or less acrimonious on the rival merits of the opposing popular preachers of Notting Hill, a general abuse of the servants, and a little talk of the last murder, elopement, or other sensational bit of intelligence in the newspapers; then Mrs. Williamson would go to sleep, the governess go back to the school-room; and Madeline, taking her needlework, would for another hour be the recipient of Miss Williamson's whispered confidences touching the last curate's last enigmatical observation. "And now, my dear, what *could* he mean by saying, 'I noticed you were not in church on Sunday, Miss Williamson, and trust you were not unwell.' It was not the words, you know, but such a very peculiar manner, &c., &c.!" Not a very enlivening prospect! What an exchange for——

But Madeline's musings were cut short, for the door opened, and a lady, almost undistinguishable in the closing twilight, came in hesitatingly. She too could hardly discern Madeline, and was beginning——

"Dear me, I beg your pardon," when our heroine sprang forward, and clasped her in her arms.

"Ah, my dear Miss Foster! my kind good friend! I have been longing to see you. Why did you not come sooner?"

"Well, my dear, I couldn't very well. You see grandmamma has been very poorly—very poorly indeed, and I was always wanted. I am not sure she knows you are in town;" and Miss Foster sat down in an arm chair.

Madeline had drawn near the window, and then seated herself close beside her, prepared for a confidential talk, though scarce able to see each other.

"I am sure, Madeline," said Miss Foster, after an interchange of inquiries, during which she held her young friend's hand, for she was more than usually tremulous and demonstrative, "that you have not been happy, dear, or comfortable; there is something sad in your voice."

"Indeed you are mistaken. I was most comfortable at Lady Templemore's, and kindly treated, but you know I am very lonely, and it is not cheering to have a fight for one's own solitary existence. *You* must know that! I wish you and I, poor isolated things, could set up together. Would it not be delightful?"

"Delightful indeed," sighed the companion, "but out of the question."

"Perhaps," returned the younger, and consequently more hopeful speaker. "I never like to think anything I wish for

quite out of the question, until I have looked at it on every side."

Here a servant entered to light the gas, so the friends could see how time had dealt with each since last they met.

"I fear you were very ill, Madeline, last autumn. You look very thin, and worn too. I hope you will like this place."

"No! dear aunty, I shall not." Madeline used sometimes to avoid the formality of repeating "Miss Foster" by adopting this appellation, and from this time it became more a habit—"I shall not remain long. It is agreed that if I do not choose to stay, or Mrs. Williamson to keep me, I shall leave at the end of the first month. But in the meantime I must endeavour to get introductions and pupils. Lady Rawson—a lady I met at the Grange—will soon be in town, I suppose. I will call upon her, for I am sure she could be a powerful friend. If I could secure some pupils before leaving it would be a great help."

"I tell you what, my dear," exclaimed Miss Foster impressively, "you must call upon Mrs. John!"

"What! My uncle's wife?"

"Yes; she is quite a clever fashionable woman, and *so* good-natured. She is very anxious to make your acquaintance. She said so that night your letter came, when grandmamma was so vexed. But oh! I forgot you know nothing about it."

"Then pray tell me!" said Madeline, "you know I ought to be informed of the Redman politics."

After some further entreaties poor Miss Foster gave a very mangled account of the famous tea party at "grandmamma's," in which she strove to soften asperities and make matters as little mortifying as possible, till connection and almost grammar were lost in the attempt.

Madeline's knowledge of the *dramatis personæ* enabled her to form a very just idea of the facts; and she hastened to relieve her friend from her difficulties.

"I understand it all. Mrs. Redman would be furious with you for helping the grandchild she dislikes so much, and you have endangered your own position, such as it is, by striving even surreptitiously to serve me! How good you are! Well, aunty, you may trust me. I shall not betray you. Now what is Mrs. John like?"

"Oh! you know I could do anything for you, and indeed I do not see why I might not. But then Mrs. Redman is a little peculiar, and so perhaps it would be better not to mention anything—that is (though I have no doubt every right to do what I can)—it would be better to say nothing about it."

"Aunty—my poor aunty," cried Madeline, smiling, "you and I are both bond slaves to poverty; therefore we have no rights—

none! We must just gather up what crumbs fall from the tables of the rich! But for ourselves we have nothing;" and Madeline pressed her hand for a moment over her eyes, in a sort of suppressed fury at the "circumstances over which she had no control"—a polite phrase cut and ready for many occasions, yet containing the epitome of life's most tragic aspect—circumstance, inanimate yet iron despot, before which the living spirit must bend or break.

"I am stronger than you though," she resumed, after a pause, which Miss Foster did not interrupt, because she felt puzzled, and not quite sure what she ought to say, "and I will fight a good fight with poverty yet."

"Well indeed, Madeline, you have a wonderful spirit, and, as I was saying, Mrs. John is quite a stylish woman, a little careless of money perhaps, but keeps her house in great style. She gives parties, too, and knows lots of people—very elegant parties I am told. I have never been at one, though she was good enough to ask me; but your grandmamma said, in her droll way, 'What do you want with Miss Foster—she is neither useful or ornamental at a party?' which I was weak enough to feel annoyed at, for there was a time, Madeline, when I had my share of good looks, and my poor father!—but that has nothing to do with it——"

Miss Foster stopped short, and the tears rolled down her pale cheeks.

"You are both, my dear aunty! No one could look at you, and not see that you are pretty still," cried Madeline, with tender flattery, "and as to usefulness—you are my one comfort and stay in the world! Do you not know that?"

"Ah! you are a good girl, Madeline! You think too much of me. But you had better go and see your aunt soon. She will be delighted with your French ways, and singing, and all that, and if she is pleased, uncle John will be the same."

"Ah! I see," said Madeline.

"And now I must go. I shall hardly get back in time for Mrs. Redman's tea. You will call, will you not? If so, perhaps you had better say nothing of my visit, eh?"

"Certainly not. I shall be guided by you. Ah! what thraldom you are in. How I wish we could live together. But time solves many difficulties. I form, as yet, no plans for my future after I leave this."

"And you are determined to leave?"

"Yes; when I can see my way. I shall call at Lady Rawson's to-morrow to know when she will be in town, and on my return I shall go and see Mrs. John Redman. Where does she live?"

"Not far from this. At No. 34, Warwick Gardens."

"I suppose I may say you informed me of her address, and encouraged me to call. She will not betray you."

"Oh, no! I should think not. And now, good-bye, dear! I have not a moment to lose!"

Miss Foster's visit cheered Madeline, though she was grieved to see the worn and depressed aspect of her friend. A strong desire to rescue her from her killing life developed the germ of a plan, even that very day, as she sat dreamily listening to Miss Williamson's whispered confidences.

She was unable, however, to carry out her intentions of calling on Lady Rawson and Mrs. John the following day, for the German professor of the piano, whose friendship she had won by her appreciation of his national music, and her frank appeal for his assistance in procuring pupils, informed her that he had recommended her to a lady whose elder daughters he taught, and consequently she must wait upon the *fraulein* that morning. Madeline readily obeyed. Movement, employment, were essential to the complete recovery from useless and sentimental regrets, which she so earnestly sought; and, in truth, she had a keen practical sense of her position and its necessities, having a strong aptitude for business. She therefore lost no time in keeping the appointment made for her by the good-natured little German, where she secured three little pupils of a much higher stamp than the young ladies of Mrs. Williamson's select establishment. This, she felt, would be great news for Miss Foster, though the distance from her present abode to her pupils' in the neighbourhood of the Marble Arch was somewhat of a drawback. However, encouraged by this success, she proceeded to the Governesses Institution to enter her name and qualifications on the books. If she could but earn a couple of pounds or thirty shillings a week, and poor Miss Foster had anything to add to the common fund, they might set up together. By the time this was accomplished it was too late and too dusk to go to Lady Rawson's, so she returned to Leamington House, meditating on her next step.

Madeline's next open day was wet, a damp drizzly wet, that clung to hair and clothes clammily. Yet she sallied forth. At her morning toilette she held long discussion with herself. Should she pay her first family visit to Mrs. John, or to her grandmother? The latter was an infliction she would fain escape; but was it not a question of duty? To that unpleasant grandmother she owed her elevation from abject poverty—from the most vagabond style of existence, to a certain standing and refinement. True, she might have appealed to her Parisian aunt, but knowing that agreeable personage as she did, how much attention would she have received had there not been an English "grandma'" of fabulous

wealth in the background? Besides, Mrs. Redman was the mother of Madeline's mother. Her mother!—that pale, faint vision of her childish years, which she fondly yet imperfectly recalled, and so ardently longed for! For Madeline's was a very Irish nature, and all that intense family love, which is nowhere else more strongly and passionately developed, existed to the full in the poor starved heart, reduced as it was to feed on husks, while hired servants had bread enough and to spare at her father's table. Yes; her first visit that day should be to Abingdon Villas.

Madeline started early, intending to call on Mrs. John, after seeing the "respectable Redman."

All things, save the weather, looked the same as on that memorable morning when little Kit brought her to make an appeal to her gradmother's natural feeling and liberality, and she vividly recalled the mixture of terror and hope with which she had looked forward to that interview. Her father had scarcely ever mentioned Mrs. Redman, but Mr. Fitzwarrene had gathered a few facts concerning her which proved a splendid source of fiction. She was a woman of rank and fortune—she would adopt and adore Madeline, who, from henceforth, would shine as an heiress, and a woman of fashion, and patronize Kit, lending him importance in the eyes even of London managers, &c., while Madeline herself anticipated a stern reception from a stately dowager, in lace and velvet, who would presently melt, and crying, "'Tis the voice of my lost child!" take her to heart, and implore her forgiveness, &c., &c. Madeline smiled to herself as she recalled these childish imaginings, and the contrast they presented to the reality of her experience. Yet she had a good deal of romance left still. At nineteen or twenty it is fortunately hard to eradicate it.

Mrs. Redman was of course at home, and, as on the occasion of Madeline's first visit, sitting in her front parlor, listening while Miss Foster read aloud the *Times;* that timid female changed colour, and made several grimaces, expressive of warning, to Madeline, as though she must inevitably inform her grandmother of her visit.

"How do you do, grandmamma?" said Madeline, cheerfully.

"Pretty well," was the reply, accompanied with a slight holding out of four rigid, unbending fingers, and an inflexible thumb.

Mrs. Redman looked more angular than formerly; her face, too, was a trifle paler; but her cap was as elaborate, and her black satin as glossy as ever. She did a few stitches of her knitting before she spoke again. Meantime Madeline greeted Miss Foster, and, unbidden, sat down beside her grandmother.

"So you've left Lady Templemore's?" was the next observation of the oracle.

"I have."

"Hum! You were foolish enough to go there, and you are a greater fool to come away, unless you were obliged, which I expect is the case."

The manner in which these words were jerked out made them especially insulting, but Madeline was determined not to take offence, and seemed in some mysterious way to be lifted above them; in short she felt she had passed out of her grandmother's keeping into her own, so she replied good-humouredly—

"No, indeed; I left voluntarily. The Grange did not agree with me; and you know health is of paramount importance."

"I suppose the family will be in town great part of the year, and I think you might have put up with the country for awhile."

"Lady Templemore wished me to remain behind with Lady Agnes while the rest of the family came up to town."

"Well, you will always go your own way; but remember, if you get into difficulties through your own obstinacy, you must not look to me for help!"

"I am innocent of any such expectation," returned Madeline, with inflexible, but by no means insolent good humor, which, nevertheless, enraged her grandmother. Here was this penniless chit, the creature of her bounty, speaking and acting with the most insulting independence,—actually standing morally upright in Mrs. Redman's presence, though without capital of any kind, or a solid basis to the amount even of one hundred pounds sterling for her pretensions! and worse than anything else, she could not be put down! She was too well-bred to utter a disrespectful syllable to a woman of Mrs. Redman's age; and the undefinable superiority which galled the coarse, strong nature of the irascible old woman, while it kept clear above out of her grasp, irritated the highly respectable matron almost beyond endurance. She felt instinctively that on no personal topic could she "rile" her granddaughter. So the detestation of the moment lent her insight enough to strike through unoffending Miss Foster.

"Indeed, if you hadn't acted so badly, refusing an excellent match that would have relieved your relatives of you altogether, I wouldn't mind having had you by me to read aloud and keep accounts; for though I say it to her face, Miss Foster has been very trying of late—fancies she can't read for more than an hour at a time, and often breaks off at the most interesting point, and lets her voice drop till it's painful to listen, and——"

"My dear Mrs. Redman," interrupted the object of these candid remarks, crimsoning to the eyes—too sensitive to be yet hardened, even though so long trained to "companionship," "I am sure I must have been very tiresome, but I am better now, you know; and though I have been reading off and on the whole morning, I do not feel very tired yet."

"Well, I do not know about being better," ejaculated the amiable grandmamma, "I only know you turned stupid over some very simple accounts yesterday, and because I just said it *was* stupid, began to cry in a ridiculous manner one could scarce excuse in a young girl, but was nonsensical in an elderly woman like you." And here Mrs. Redman expressed a very common feeling. What ready sympathy is given to the tender tears of youth, which only make ensuing smiles seem the brighter, but how many are ready to consider the scalding drops which depression, disappointment, and the wearing conflict of everyday life, wring from the heart of an elderly woman, as nonsensical! Madeline's bright chivalrous spirit sprang up at these gratuitous insults to one she loved and pitied, but with the impulse rose the caution instilled by the severe lessons of her early youth, and she checked the retort already quivering on her lip. Why should she make matters worse for Miss Foster by irritating the ogress whose purse gave her such power, when she must leave her friend in her clutches?

"You are looking ill, certainly," observed Madeline, gazing earnestly at the gentle worn face, the soft dim eyes full of tears, the pale lips quivering. "If Miss Foster had change of air and scene, as doctors say, she would be quite set up, and able to read to you interminably."

"Well, I wonder where the money is to come from," Mrs. Redman was beginning, when Mrs. Comerford came in to pay her daily visit to her mother, and take her usual dose of snubbing. Mrs. Redman was really pleased to see her. Here was some one who devoutly believed in her supremacy, and never ventured to stand upright in her presence. Here was a loyal upholder of legitimacy to encounter that young red republican Madeline, who brought with her always an atmosphere of freedom and independence, in which Mrs. Redman's authority seemed to wither and fade away.

"Here's Miss Digby," said Mrs. Redman shortly, almost before Mrs. Comerford had wished her good morning—as though that statement was at once an accusation and a *casus belli*.

"Indeed!" returned Mrs. Comerford, puzzled, yet too good-natured to be rude. "Very glad to see you, I am sure; I did not know you were in town."

Madeline rose and shook hands with her aunt, while Mrs. Redman continued—

"Left Lady Templemore's just in the same obstinate manner she refused that promising young man, Mr. Moorcroft, and I can tell her she is not likely to get another offer. There are few men who would marry a poor governess like her."

This shaft struck deep. Did she not know it but too well, and perhaps at that moment she did passionately regret not having accepted Dudley Ashurst as a lover. Since none were willing to

have her as a wife, was she therefore to be condemned to lead a lonely, joyless, colourless existence?

"Well, well," returned poor Mrs. Comerford, "it was rather foolish, but it can't be helped now, though really it was a pity. John says he is a most rising young man, and has been made one of the directors in that new company—oh! I forget the name, something about tubular bridges."

"You don't say so?" ejaculated Mrs. Redman, to whose old world notions the word "director" conveyed vague ideas of power and unlimited respectability. "There now, I am sure there never was a woman more disappointed than I am, to have a grand-daughter living I don't know how, from hand to mouth, when she might have been comfortable and respectable, and my son married to a woman that treats me like the dirt under her feet."

"Oh hush! hush gran'ma' dear," interrupted Mrs. Comerford, with a warning glance at Madeline.

"Mind your own business, Susan," returned her mother angrily. "What do I care if that girl goes and repeats everything. I suppose," to Madeline, "you are going to see your uncle's wife?"

"I intended to do; as I always found him very kind, and I hope he is happy."

"There! I knew it," cried Mrs. Redman triumphantly to Miss Foster. "I told you she would be currying favour with Mrs. John."

"If you desire it I will not call," said Madeline, putting her grandmother in a corner.

"I desire nothing of the kind, you may do as you like; but I do desire to know where you are staying and what you are doing; you shall not disgrace me if I can prevent it."

Madeline quietly handed Mrs. Redman her card with her address written thereon. "If you feel inclined to call I shall be most happy to see you." Madeline's calm good breeding somewhat bridled the old woman's indiscriminate irascibility.

"Hum," she said, "it might do you good to let the people see you had some one respectable belonging to you; what do they pay you?"

"Nothing; I get board and lodging in return for lessons in music."

"Well, that is a poor affair. But how did you happen to go there?" bristling up again. "I suppose, Miss Foster, you disobeyed me and treated my orders with contempt!" Poor Miss Foster was undone had not Madeline stepped in.

"I greatly regretted having troubled Miss Foster on the subject, when she told me you forbid her performing my commission."

"Ha!" returned Mrs. Redman, sinking back in her chair, robbed of her prey.

"I will say good-morning, then," said Madeline, rising and thinking she had borne enough.

"Good-bye to you," said Mrs. Redman, a shade less ungraciously than before.

"Good-morning, my dear, and I shall be happy to see you any day you like to call—that is," remembering herself, "I should be, if dear grandma' can approve of your conduct, and you—in short I shall be happy to do anything," concluded Mrs. Comerford vaguely not daring to be too civil, and yet finding it difficult to patronise the well-dressed, well-mannered, self-reliant girl before her.

"Good-bye, dear friend," whispered Madeline as she pressed a kiss on Miss Foster's pale cheek, "you must get away from the giant's castle or you will die, and I must help you."

The weather had cleared a little when Madeline sallied forth, and she decided on paying her intended visit to Mrs. John, especially as Warwick Gardens lay in her homeward way.

As she walked quietly across Kensington Gardens, she felt her spirits rise at each step which bore her further from her grandmother's oppressive presence.

How strange it was that this old woman should be a grief to herself, though possessed of the means to make life lovely, dutiful children, friends to esteem her—more than enough of this world's goods, and yet never happy, never content. "If she could have loved me," reflected Madeline, "what happiness she might both have given and received!" *Certes*, among the phenomena of life none are more puzzling than that intense selfishness which defeats its own ends, by shutting out sympathy in the joys or sorrows of others.

Mr. John Redman's house in Warwick Gardens was of the usual modern suburban type, it was semi-detached, had a dining-room at one side of the entrance, and two drawing-rooms at the other, a small back parlour dignified by the appellation of the "library," and a glass box on the first landing called a conservatory. The steps were very white, and the brasses very bright, and a very smart parlour-maid answered the door in an extra fashionable cap. Mrs. John was at home, and Madeline was shown into the drawing-room, a chilly apartment, with a good deal of gilding and looking-glass about it, blue and gold brocade curtains, and all the furniture in brown holland pinafores; there were albums and wax flowers too, but as yet *cartes de visite* were not. Before Madeline had completed her survey of the room, she heard a loud quick voice exclaim outside, "Mary Anne, bring back the cold mutton," and thereupon Mrs. John entered; she was attired in a dark linsey, very elaborately braided, with collar, cuffs, and

apron all *selon les règles*, and large fat white hands covered with rings.

"How do you do, Miss Digby? Very glad to make your acquaintance. You must want your luncheon, and I have not quite finished mine, so come into the dining-room. I generally sit there of a morning, it is cosier."

So saying, she shook Madeline's hand cordially, and then gave her a little push towards the door. Madeline accepted the invitation, and crossing the hall was conducted into the dining-room, which felt warm and comfortable, with a large fire blazing up the chimney, and the orthodox Turkey carpet, sideboard with looking-glass back, and bronze ornaments on the mantel-piece.

The further end of the dinner-table was covered with a table-cloth, and the smart parlour-maid was in the act of replacing a cold shoulder of mutton.

"Have you come here direct, and where are you staying?" continued Mrs John, cutting two or three thick slices, as though prepared to feed the hungry.

"I have come from my grandmother's," replied Madeline, "and I am at present staying at a ladies' school not far from this."

"Oh! if you have come from old Mrs. Redman's I fancy you must want your luncheon; some beer, Mary Anne," said Mrs. John all in a breath. "I have often heard Miss Foster speak of you, but you are not the least bit like what I expected to see," she continued. "I fancied you would be a tall fine-looking girl."

"Instead of a small insignificant one," returned Madeline, laughing good-humouredly.

"Well, you are not very big, and you do not somehow look English, but you will do very well; and how did you get on with grandma'—what an awful sour old thing she is! and she hates me like poison. You see they are all so afraid of her, and I have been too much accustomed to be looked up to all my life to knock under now, I can tell her; besides, she hasn't so much to leave behind her, and my husband, thank God, does not want it—take some beer," concluded Mrs. John, who, even in the exercise of opposition to her mother-in-law, evinced by hospitality to Madeline, would never have thought of wasting her dinner sherry, at thirty shillings a dozen, on a dependent.

"Mrs. Redman certainly has not a sunny nature," returned Madeline, "but I owe her much; now, however, I think I am in a fair way to maintain myself, and do not intend to let her peculiarities distress me."

"Well, I think she hates you worse even than me, but do you just take *my* part, and you'll find I can be a good friend. I hope to see a good deal of company this spring, and I will always ask you in the evening, and you can sing, you know, and all

that, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if you picked up a good match."

"Thank you," said Madeline, laughing, "I am afraid you rate my chances too high."

"Oh no! you seem good-humoured, and there is nothing men like so much as laughter and jolliness. I am always in good spirits, and you can't think what a favourite I have been and am; and then I dress well, that is another point—by the way, what is the stuff in your dress? I never saw any like it."

"This is a French cloth, I got it in Paris, and Lady Templemore's dressmaker at Greybridge made, or rather altered it, for me."

"Indeed! will you just slip off your shawl, and let me see the cut? Very elegant, I declare! and you have an uncommon neat figure, I must say. Did her ladyship lend you the pattern?"

"Oh no!" returned Madeline, "I would not wear a dress made like Lady Templemore's." She spoke sincerely, for her taste, formed on the Parisian mould, was fastidious, but this morsel of "bumptiousness" did her great service with Mrs. John, who was ready enough, like most of her calibre, to take people at their own valuation.

"Ah! I forgot, you have been abroad, a long time in Paris, I believe? Now I dare say you could give me some useful hints when I want a new dress?—and you sing, too. Miss Foster has told me all about it, and oh! law, *what* a life the old lady leads *her*. She had better be in a penitentiary."

"Poor Miss Foster!" ejaculated Madeline, somewhat imposed upon by the species of cordiality with which Mrs. John's love of novelty, amusement, and gossip, clothed her selfishness. Madeline was so ready to receive and reciprocate kindness, that, although this newly-made aunt somewhat offended her taste, she was grateful for the warmth of her reception, contrasted as it was with her grandmother's, and gave Mrs. John credit for warmth of heart, if not elegance of manner, and so, with courteous frankness, continued, "I owe the pleasure of this visit to Miss Foster, you know she arranged for me to come to my present abode, without Mrs. Redman's knowledge, and when she came to see me there, said she thought you would be good enough to receive me *en amie*, or I shoul not have come."

"I'm sure I am delighted," returned Mrs. John, charmed with the importance this seemed to reflect upon her, "and your uncle will be pleased too. Can't you stay to see him? He comes home to what we used to call a meat tea at Rockville, about seven."

"Thank you, I do not like to absent myself from Mrs. Williamson's tea-table, without giving notice, and now, if you will let me see the baby, I must say good-bye."

"Oh to be sure! He is a fine little fellow, nearly four months

old, so different from the Comerford children. Even grandma is proud of him, and he is the image of me."

The bell was duly rung, and the baby paraded, in a very fine frock. He was a monster of fat, with an inconvenient head. Madeline, who was totally ignorant of babies, and had no great instinct for them, though extremely fond of little children, exclaimed with genuine surprise at his growth and fatness, which sufficiently satisfied the mother's vanity, and then Madeline reassumed her shawl, and parted very cordially with Mrs. John, who promised to "go and see her," to "invite her one Sunday to see her uncle," "to see if she couldn't pick her up a smart young man," &c., calling out some witticism on this head, in very audible tones, after Madeline as she descended the steps.

"It is well," she thought, "there is one among my few relatives who is not refrigerated towards me by Mrs. Redman; but what a droll, strange person Mrs. John seems."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MADELINE'S month of probation was drawing to a close, and she felt still undecided. Mrs. Williamson's was not a very happy or desirable abode; yet she was by no means hopeful of improving her position by any change.

In this uncertainty Mrs. Williamson found her one morning, and suggested her continuing to the end of the quarter, adding many compliments as to her agreeability as an inmate, while prudently suppressing all commendation of her abilities as a teacher. Madeline had no reply, no plan ready. Lady Rawson, on whose friendship and counsel she almost unconsciously placed the greatest reliance, had not yet come to town. To go into lodgings alone was not to be thought of, even had she the means to support herself there; so, after a hasty mental glance at her circumstances, she consented. Hardly had she done so, when a feeling of regret—a chafing, as it were, against prison bars—arose within her, and feeling utterly unsettled, she determined to walk over to Abingdon Villas after the midday dinner, on the chance of having a word or two in private with Miss Foster.

The dinner was scarcely over, when the somewhat unusual sound of wheels stopping at the front door attracted attention, and a few minutes after the servant informed Madeline "she was wanted in the drawing-room." Thither she repaired, and found Miss Foster very pale and tremulous, with Mrs. Williamson, who was elaborately entertaining her by elegantly-expressed praises of her own establishment, system, connection, &c. Madeline immediately saw that some unusual occurrence had shaken her friend's nerves,

almost beyond the power of self-control, so she speedily carried her off to the privacy of her own little bedroom.

Directly they were shut into that small sanctum, the poor companion broke into almost hysterical weeping.

"Oh, dear Madeline," she said, through her sobs, "she has sent me away, turned me into the streets. I have my boxes on a cab at the door, and nowhere to go to! What shall I do? The only relation I have in the world is my nephew, and he is a clergyman in the north, with a large family. Oh, Madeline! it seems foolish for a woman at my time of life to come to you for help; but indeed I do not know what to do." And the poor nervous creature wept and shivered like a helpless beaten child.

Then Madeline put her arms round her, and soothed and hushed her with tender, firm expressions.

"Try and compose yourself, dear friend, and tell me all about it, that I may comprehend what is the matter."

"Well, you see," began Miss Foster, taking up the tale which, amid many sobs, she brokenly related. "You see, Mrs. John came to see her yesterday, and that always puts her out; and Mrs. John did go on so about you, dear. I'm sure I was, or would have been, delighted to hear her, only your grandmamma is so peculiar, she seems vexed when you are praised. And then she said something about your being very comfortable in the place I had got for you, and suddenly it all came out, how I had managed it all unknown to Mrs. Redman; then she went into such a fury. Oh, you never saw anything like it! I thought she would have murdered me, nothing was bad enough to call me. And Mrs. John took my part, and tried to laugh at it all, and that made her worse. Then, my not being strong, you know, I began to cry, and said I would go away. And she said I might, for I was no use to myself or any one else; and then I had a sort of a fit up in my own room. And Sarah (the housemaid, you know), she really was very kind, I couldn't help giving her five shillings when I came away; well, she sent up three times that afternoon to know when I was going."

"Who, Sarah?" asked Madeline.

"No, no; Mrs. Redman. I really did not think she meant it. After living together nearly nine years. Yes, it would have been nine years next June." And poor Miss Foster, overcome by the recollection of that terrible blank, that space of slavery, burst out afresh. She had in truth borne the burden and heat of the day, and had gained her dismissal. "You see," she resumed, "Mrs. Redman had been thinking me useless for some time, since I had been so poorly, and thought this was a good opportunity for getting rid of me. I have never thought it before, but it seemed to flash upon me all at once, last night, the third time she sent to

ask if I was going. So I just sent word that I should leave in the morning as soon as I could get my things ready; and she breakfasted in her room, and only came down when the cab was at the door: even then she said a great many unkind things, though I do think she will miss me when she gets another companion, especially when she has to pay; for you know, Madeline," continued the poor bruised reed apologetically, "she is a little too fond of money."

"It is her only instinct," murmured Madeline. "And do you mean to say she paid you no wages; that you served her all these years, endured the misery of being with her, for nothing? Surely you might have done better than that."

"Well, you see, dear, I had a little of my own, not enough to live upon, about thirty pounds a year; and when my poor brother died (he had been long ill, I lived with him, and was of use to him in some ways) his son (the clergyman, you know) advised me to advertise for a companion's place, and to put 'salary not so much an object as a comfortable home,' and do you know, no one answered it but Mrs. Redman; she said she would give no salary, but a *very* comfortable home; and it was really very fortunate, for just then I had not a penny, my poor brother having left some little debts, which my nephew and myself felt ought to be paid; and with his large family (though it was not so large, of course, then) could do very little. But, dear, dear, I am running off into all sorts of things. So I was bare enough when Mrs. Redman took me, and what with making a respectable appearance, and making up mistakes about change when she sent me shopping, I could save nothing more than ten sovereigns, which I have in my purse, and half-a-crown, which will not pay the cab; and that brings me back, dear Madeline, to ask what would you advise me to do? What *shall* I do?" There was positive despair in the tone of this last question, followed by a short pause, and then impelled by a sudden prick of conscience, she exclaimed: "Oh! I ought to say, she certainly gave me a silk dress every second year, but I always paid for the making and trimming myself."

"Say two pounds ten per annum for your companionship, care, and endless perusals of the police reports," said Madeline, smiling rather bitterly. "But, dearest aunty, this is a serious matter, we must act in some way to-day; let me think, you must get lodgings, and food, and—yes!—I will go with you to find them. Listen to me, dear aunty—you have ten pounds, I have twenty; you have thirty pounds a-year, I make a pound a week by my music lessons *now*, and hope soon to make more. Could we venture to start in partnership on this capital? You know all about price and food, which I do not. Could we, do you think, get lodgings for your thirty pounds a-year, and food for my pound a-week?"

"Oh! we could live on a pound a week," said Miss Foster, brightening at the bare idea, "but I am afraid about lodgings, we could get very poor ones for eleven or twelve shillings a week."

"Let us try and find them," said Madeline with her usual energy, "think of having a home together! Evenings free from Mrs. Redman or any other mistress! Aunty, I feel wild with joy at the idea! You and I have had a horrible life of it; come, in heaven's name, let us start on a joint voyage of discovery to find a better one. I have unfortunately committed myself to Mrs. Williamson, to-day, but I shall get out of that, and——but come along, we shall see what we can do."

Madeline quickly assumed her out-door dress, and then, after a moment's reflection, asked Miss Foster if she had any friend where she might leave her luggage for a day. Poor Miss Foster ran her mind's eye over the whole range of polite acquaintances whom she had made while Mrs. Redman's companion, and in the worse than savage isolation of London life could think of none, till at last she said—

"There is a very respectable woman, the wife of a greengrocer, in fact the man who goes out waiting—quite a gentlemanly man—she used to do a little dressmaking for me before they took to the greengrocery, I once helped her to nurse her little girl, who was ill (Mrs. Redman was away with the Comerfords at Ramsgate, at the time) and ever since she has been very grateful, I think she would take in my boxes."

"The very thing," cried Madeline; "there we can dismiss the cab, and your friend may probably give us some advice about lodgings."

So saying she opened the door, and Miss Foster, who had bathed her poor swollen eyes, and otherwise removed as much as she could the traces of her emotion, followed her young directress down-stairs.

The greengrocer's wife proved faithful to her expressed feelings, took in the luggage, and piled it in an empty potato bin; moreover, on being asked to recommend some humble hotel in the neighbourhood where Miss Foster might pass the night, eagerly and deferentially urged her acceptance of a night's lodging under her roof, and to this they ultimately agreed. Her advice too, respecting their search for lodgings proved very valuable. Madeline frankly told her the small rent they could afford, whereat she looked surprised, at the discrepancy between the refined appearance of the speaker and the miserable sum named. She however suggested that in the large old-fashioned houses that border the New Road, bed-room floors were sometimes let at lower rates than could be afforded by the owners of smaller and more modern houses.

The locality was also in the vicinity of Madeline's pupils, for often it is but a mere step in space that separates the sublime of fashion from the ridiculous of non-fashion.

It was weary work, and the slightly lengthening February afternoon had closed in before they had fixed themselves. Poor Miss Foster was nearly exhausted and half hysterical, but Madeline was intensely bent on finishing her work of emancipation; at last she returned to a house very clean and tolerably airy, which at an earlier hour the friends had rejected because of the extreme scarcity of furniture, and after some discussion of preliminaries with the owner, a severe but honest-looking woman, agreed to become the tenants of a large three-windowed room on the second floor front, with a threadbare carpet, dingy curtains, half-a-dozen chairs, a table, a sofa (which was also a bed), and a cane-bottomed, misnamed, easy chair; this, with a smaller room behind, scantily furnished as a bedroom, was to be theirs at the large sum of twelve shillings and sixpence per week.

"Rather more than thirty pounds a year, love," whispered Miss Foster.

"Is it? never mind," returned Madeline in the same key.

"How about references, mum?" asked the severe landlady. "I am always very particular. Mr. Varley, the minister of the Wesleyan chapel in Burton Lane knows me well, and will tell any one my character."

"Our reference," returned Madeline calmly, "is Mr. John Redman, 22, Warwick Gardens, Notting Hill, and Size Lane, City; —stay, I will write it down on Miss Foster's card for you."

"Oh mum, that will do, I know Warwick Gardens—elegant houses, and the best quality, carriage people many of them, live there; when would you like to come in, ladies?"

"To-morrow," replied Madeline decidedly; "to-morrow at tea-time."

"Very well, ma'am," said the landlady, mollified by the quiet old-maidish respectability of Miss Foster, and the air of distinction which was so visibly stamped on her young companion.

"My dear," said Miss Foster as they took their way towards the Marble Arch, "were you not afraid to give Mr. John's name as a reference without his leave?—perhaps he might not like it."

"Nothing venture nothing win," said Madeline, with a laugh. "Our new mistress, the landlady, would not have taken us in had I hesitated a moment; and I will write to my uncle this evening (enclosing the note, open of course, to the redoubtable Mrs. John, and begging her good offices), explaining the whole business; but in all probability no inquiries will be made. Now, aunty, dear, I must leave you. I have a great deal to do to-night,

and don't you go and cry and make yourself wretched. Remember, you have not to meet Mrs. Redman at breakfast to-morrow, that you are free, and that we are going to be very happy."

Madeline had certainly sufficient work for that evening, and the next day also. Her most difficult task was to appease and arrange with Mrs. Williamson. This was at last accomplished by her promising to give her music lessons as usual for one month without remuneration. Nevertheless it was a joyful day. When she started to meet Miss Foster at their new abode she was a little in advance of her friend, and therefore, to her great satisfaction, ready to receive her. Miss Foster looked better than the day before, but the poor thing's gentility was a little startled and affronted by the short, sharp, and decisive appearance of the landlady, who rose for a few seconds above the head of the kitchen stair and uttered a careless "Good day, ladies. You'll find the rooms all right. Come, Hemma," to the servant, who was assisting to bring in the trunks, "I want you down-stairs."

"One moment," said Madeline, pleasantly. "If you cannot spare your servant how shall we get our luggage taken up?"

"Well, I can't spare her; but there's a boy down-stairs will help for a sixpence, I daresay."

"Let us have him, by all means."

So the landlady went down, the boy came up, and the friends' belongings were duly stowed away.

"Let us set to work at once and settle ourselves," said Madeline, "and then go out and see the neighbourhood, and buy bread and tea, and things. You shall give me a lesson. Look here, aunty. This cupboard by the fireplace is not very elegant, but we can put quantities of things away in it, and there are two more in our bedroom. And what a number of carriages and omnibuses seem to pass; you will be quite amused here of a morning while I am away."

It was certainly not a brilliant beginning of partnership, yet how delightful it all seemed to our two wanderers. No sudden parting lest any one should be waiting and scold; no hesitation about uttering the thought within lest it might give offence; no ever-present sense of constraint and slavery, but the freedom, the heart-rest, which constitutes home.

Both were somewhat weary when they sallied down-stairs to ask directions from the landlady, who recommended the different shops with a sort of reserve, as though she feared she might be held in any way responsible for their debts. And their shopping was a new source of delight; and what a charming repast they had of tea, brown bread and butter, and eggs, and afterwards, though Miss Foster was rather fidgeted by the extreme sootiness of the small servant, and discomfited by the request, "Please mum,

Mrs. Rumble says you'll find it better to keep up the kettle, for it's the kettle as belongs to this floor, and then it will be always handy."

"What a horrible black thing!" said Madeline, with a gay laugh. "Could it not be made to look a little better, Emma?"

"Oh, yes, miss," returned Emma, brightening at her genial manner and sympathetic tone. "It might be, a deal, but—but I had better not take it down *now*," she concluded, with a littl something of awe in her voice.

"I understand. You shall take it when you can."

"But, dear, dear! such a thing will quite spoil the look of the sitting-room," sighed Miss Foster.

"The general appointments are so elegant," returned Madeline, laughing heartily at her distressed tone. "But courage, dear aunty; in a few days we shall make it all much better."

While Madeline spoke thus cheerily her eye glanced round the room and took in its mean details, aptly finishing with the retreating figure of the sooty servant, and her taste shrank from it all with loathing. And now, but for her rejection of his proffered love, she might be revelling in all the refinements of wealth and station with Dudley Ashurst; yet, strange to say, she did not feel that aching, yearning, longing for him she often experienced, though feeling the contrast between the actual and the "might have been" most keenly. It seemed that even this poor approach to home offered a rest to her heart; the adoption of the dismissed companion supplied a tie to her life that reconciled her to those social laws from which as yet she had reaped little benefit.

The morning's awakening sense of freedom was also delicious, but soon after breakfast Madeline was obliged to leave Miss Foster to her own devices and hurry away to her pupils, leaving their domestic arrangements in her hands.

It was a bright cold day towards the end of February, when Madeline had been about a week installed as partner, guide, and protector to her friend, when, as she was returning from a hard day's work at Mrs. Williamson's, she crossed the Bayswater Road, intending to return through Kensington Gardens. As she stepped upon the pavement she was accosted by a smart servant, who touched his hat and said: "Lady Rawson's love; would you be good enough to speak to her?"

"Lady Rawson! where?"

"In the carriage, just here," said the man, and Madeline became aware of a dark, elegantly-appointed brougham, with one superb horse, which was drawing up beside the footway, and in it she discerned Lady Rawson's brilliant complexion and flashing black eyes.

"How do you do, Miss Digby? I thought it was you, and,

coutê qui coutê, determined to stop you. Where are you staying, and what are you doing?"

These point blank questions were accompanied by a keen, searching glance, which Madeline felt took in every detail of her dress and bearing. So much more of meaning did it convey to her that she coloured deeply, while she answered, with a smile: "I am busy getting up what is called 'a connection' with pupils for music, and I am living with a lady who was companion to my grandmother. I had intended calling upon you, Lady Rawson, according to your kind permission, but did not know you had come to town."

"Only arrived the day before yesterday. I am delighted to see you, and will do all in my power to help you. Come to luncheon with me. Let me see!—to-morrow, at two—can you?" said Lady Rawson, with great cordiality.

"To-morrow!—yes, certainly. I shall be most happy!"

"Give me your address, then, lest I might by any accident miss you. And now I must go on, for I have fifty things to do. I can't say how glad I am to have met you."

And with a smile and warm pressure of the hand, Lady Rawson drove off.

"Well, my dear!" cried Miss Foster, when Madeline reached home, "who do you think came to see us to-day?"

"I cannot imagine!"

"Well, Mrs. John—herself. She came in great style—in a brougham. Mrs. Rumble showed her up; so that will prove we are not common people! She was very kind, indeed, and very curious to know how Mrs. Redman and I parted; but I said as little as I could. She was very much disappointed not to see you; and begged you would call soon. But, oh! Madeline! she seemd quite disgusted with the rooms, and asked what we paid for this wretched hole."

"Well, her opinion does not add to its wretchedness, aunty, does it? By-and-by, when we grow richer, we must beautify it a little. Now hear my news!" and Madeline recounted her meeting with Lady Rawson, which adventure immediately raised the most brilliant expectations in the sanguine heart of Miss Foster.

"I am sure it is most fortunate! She will, no doubt, ask you to her parties, and I should not be surprised if some great rich man fell in love with you. Ah! Madeline! you are a strange girl, and so reserved in some ways; but now we are living so happily together we ought not to have secrets; and I confess I have often suspected that it was some love affair made you leave Lady Templemore."

Madeline felt suddenly pierced by this random shot, and the painful reluctance she felt to tell the simple-minded modest wo-

man that she had been sought, not to be an honoured wife, but a toy too slight for any permanent tie, revealed to her the suffering she had escaped by her choice of life, and flashed out in an instantaneous blaze of light the full force of general opinion on this subject. "I did wisely—I did well; yet, would to God I were with you, Ashurst!" was the inner utterance of her heart. But she said aloud—

"You are right, dear aunty; and as it was altogether a painful affair, let us speak of it no more. I am out of humour with love and lovers."

"Dear, dear!" returned Miss Foster, with a wistful look, sorely disappointed not to be the recipient of a long sentimental confidence; but despite Madeline's great tenderness and consideration, there was a certain power in her character and manner which Miss Foster always lovingly obeyed.

The subject, therefore, dropped, and the partners applied themselves to the examination of the week's accounts, in order to insure their not overstepping the limits they had laid down for themselves. On this occasion they were highly satisfied, and found, after all payments made, a balance of four shillings out of the allotted sum.

"This is charming!" cried Madeline. "What do you want most, aunty, in the shape of toilette?"

"Oh, nothing! I am rather well off, you know, and here I can wear an old dress such as I used to be obliged to give away."

"Suppose, then," said Madeline, with an air of the deepest reflection—"suppose we buy a new kettle, and then Emma can keep it tolerably clean, for I do not think she can ever make much of this one."

"I think, dear," suggested Miss Foster, with much hesitation—"but remember, I only mention it!—we might buy a teapot instead. You know we *may* keep the kettle, but the teapot goes up and down; and the difficulty of getting that teapot in time to have your tea ready when you come in, words can't tell! Indeed, if we could collect a tea-set of our own, it would make us most independent."

"Well thought!" said Madeline, kissing her, "your *forte* is domestic management. I could never get on without you. We shall have a charming *ménage* one of these days."

"Then you agree with me? I should be sorry to dictate in any way; but *I think* a teapot—eh! Madeline?"

"A teapot, decidedly; and there are the four shillings; go and buy one to-morrow."

They were wonderfully happy, these two insignificant pawns on life's chess-board, in their somewhat desolate freedom. If health was spared them they could get on—if not?—well, it was no use

to meet trouble half-way; they hoped all would go easily, and to them the future was far from gloomy.

"If I could get something to do," said Miss Foster, "even plain work, or gimp trimming—or anything. It is terrible to live on you, dear."

"But you do not; you are a woman of independent fortune, and you pay the rent! I tell you what I wish for—nay, I fear I must get ere long—a piano. I must practise. My living depends on my voice and skill. We will see! I hope it will be fine to-morrow, as I shall dress as well as possible, and after my music lessons must go on to Lady Rawson's. So now to bed—to bed! aunty."

Lady Rawson's house was very new—in a new quarter—and decorated and furnished with the newest taste and appliances. She was writing letters in a small study, or book-room, opening off the first landing, when Madeline was ushered into her presence.

"Punctuality itself!" said her ladyship, rising, and greeting her cordially; "and you look as fresh as a morning in May. (Madeline had walked quickly across the Park, for the day was dry and clear.) Now, take off your bonnet. Luncheon has just been announced, and you ought to be healthily hungry with that colour."

So saying, Lady Rawson gathered her papers and writing materials together, with a sort of rough method, and drawing Madeline's arm through hers, in a kindly patronising way, conducted her down-stairs, where, in a small dining-room at the back of the house, a tempting luncheon was laid out—a roast pheasant and sweetbreads, besides sundry small and delicate dishes of dessert. A stately man in black rendered solemn service, and Lady Rawson, performing dexterously and hospitably the task of carving, pressed Madeline to eat, and set her a good example.

"Barnard, put the Madeira on the table, and you may go." The solemn man placed a decanter on her ladyship's right, and departed.

"Now then, Miss Digby, take a glass of Madeira, it is very rare wine, which I do not offer to every one, and tell me all about it."

"About what?" said Madeline laughing, and accepting the Madeira.

"Oh, you know what I mean!—that captivating colonel. My dear! do you know I got quite a turn, as housemaids say, when I met you. I did not know what to think, or rather I had very little hope, for considering the conditions of the case I did not think there was a chance of your escape. Don't colour up, and look like a small Nemesis. Young as you are, you have too much

brains not to know I speak truth, and, moreover, I do not wish to hurt you. That Ashurst was a dangerous man—the worst sort of a deceiver, for he deceived himself! Come now, confess I was right, that he was desperately smitten, and ready to offer you everything, but—marriage!"

Madeline shrank from this terrible baring to the light of all her agony and mortification, yet there was no unkindness in Lady Rawson's tone, though a good deal of curiosity, and no more of coarseness than is inevitably imparted by the hardening effect of life in the so-called "world." So she nerved herself to reply. She knew that she must make a friend of this bold, active woman, and she knew also that an exhibition of strength, rather than sentiment, would attach and interest her.

"You were a true prophet, or rather, your wide world-knowledge was unerring. It was as you suppose."

"And how did it all end! For you were in love with him. I am certain you were. I don't wonder at it. I think I should be in love with him myself, with all my knowledge, if he made love to me. How did you manage to refuse, eh?"

"I did not choose to be his mistress," faltered Madeline, "though, Lady Rawson," she exclaimed in a firm tone, her suppressed feelings blazing out, "I would rather have been his mistress than the wife of another! Oh! you who know life so well, who have seen and observed so much, tell me—have I acted wisely, or have I thrown away the substance for a shadow?"

Lady Rawson paused.

"You have done wisely," she said at last; "though I confess in turn, that life is such a muddle, and a few years of happiness such a rich possession, I almost hesitate to say so. I do not think Ashurst is a man to behave shabbily or basely to any woman, but he would have left you as certainly as he then adored you! When the old grandfather dies, and he dons the earl's robes, they will suggest new duties and pleasures, legitimate heirs, and all that sort of thing, and the woman whose love and devotion to himself put her beyond the pale of legitimacy would be thrown aside inevitably. I do not see that she could expect anything else! Besides, though I am not straight-laced, but see things by the light of reality and worldly wisdom, it *is* disgraceful for a woman to give herself to a man who cannot acknowledge her in the face of society, who openly avows by his conduct that she is only good enough for a temporary companion!"

"Thank you, Lady Rawson," said Madeline, gazing dreamily out of her large dark eyes at the word-picture conjured up by her companion. "You reassure me I *have* done wisely. To you I dare speak truth, and I must say that I very nearly consented to go with him abroad, and that I have frequently since regretted I

did not. I have nothing of a martyr's spirit, and it seems to me that if you can neither bestow nor obtain pleasure there is no use in existing, and my life has been so desolate, so denuded of ties and tenderness. I can imagine bearing trouble and grief for any one you loved, or who had a real claim upon you; but to go on day after day, enduring loneliness and misunderstanding, and mental imprisonment, and knowing of no life in the real meaning of the word, as I have done—I who can so deeply, so passionately enjoy—why should I not endeavour to escape from so wretched a lot? And what a contrast was presented to it! How I longed to fly with Colonel Ashurst far, far from everything connected with my old existence, and revel in sunshine and enjoyment, were it but for a season, let what would of chaos come after! Even now I am astonished at myself for resisting, and it was such a dim undefined instinct which held me back. *You* have put it into words, and I see I was right, quite right."

"You are certainly made of stronger stuff than ordinary women," said Lady Rawson, with involuntary admiration, her pulses beating a little quicker at the enthusiasm of Madeline's words, and the passionate music of her voice, "and I heartily congratulate you on your decision. You are not one of the washy kind of girls to go and break your heart for a man, so I trust there is a bright future, and a happy home in store for you; and now, tell me what you are doing?"

Madeline therefore recalled herself from the glow of her confessions, and gave a sketch of her proceedings since leaving Lady Templemore's, to the establishment of her present partnership with Miss Foster.

Lady Rawson laughed good-naturedly at the idea of their starting on so slender a capital, for with a few well-put queries she elicited the state of their finances. "Take care you do not find this poor old maid not only a heavy encumbrance, but a shocking bore; yet you want some sort of protection, you are so young and so pretty—no, not pretty—worse—attractive!"

"Do not speak so," said Madeline, shrinking from this offensive description of her friend. "The word old maid does not express my dear Miss Foster. She is a helpless, deserted child, only without the attraction and charm of childhood. She has been and is a treasure to me. I could not resist the temptation to throw in my lot with hers, and take care of her." As she spoke, the muscles of her mouth relaxed, her eyes became suffused, and a smile of unutterable tenderness and sweetness played round her lips.

"Good God!" exclaimed Lady Rawson, starting. "How like you look at this moment to your father!"

"My father!" cried Madeline, almost breathless with surprise. "Did you know him?"

"This has indeed been a morning of confessions," said Lady Rawson, with a short laugh, while she knit her brows. "I have seen him; and there, ask me no more, and let us not talk of him again."

"Certainly not, if you desire it; but, dear Lady Rawson, it *would* be such a pleasure to speak of him."

"Well, not now—not now," returned her ladyship, looking down gloomily, and pressing the points of a silver dessert fork into the cloth. "I will perhaps open the subject, but *you* must not."

There was a few moments' pause, Madeline discreetly keeping silence, then Lady Rawson looked up and said in her ordinary manner, "I'll tell you what I shall do for you; the week after next I have a musical party on a small scale, and you shall come and sing with that poor little creature Fitzharris."

"What! Mr. Fitzharris!" said Madeline. "I thought you were not friends."

"Friends! indeed," returned her ladyship, with supreme contempt. "He hates me; but do you think I would spoil my parties for want of him, or he make a gap in his *clientelle* to spite me—no, no! besides, *I* don't dislike him, and he will show you off. If you could make a connection to go out and sing at evening parties, good houses you know, it would be an easier and pleasanter mode of providing for the 'firm' than teaching. You might find pupils too, through an introduction here."

"How kind and good you are!" cried Madeline. "I should always be delighted to sing at *your* house; but I think I should prefer the teaching."

"Nonsense! don't be mawkish. Now, how are you off for dress? What do you propose to wear?"

"A clear white muslin demi-toilette, with a Roman sash, and a smaller one in my hair. Would that do?"

"Yes, I daresay it would; but you must come here, and——"

"The carriage is at the door, my lady."

"Now, then, Miss Digby, I will drive you home; but while I am putting on my bonnet, take this address-book and write yours, that I may send you a note, when I have fixed with little Fitz about practising."

CHAPTER XXV.

THIS interview with Lady Rawson proved a great source of comfort to Madeline. It gave her courage and confidence. Moreover, it seemed to have placed Dudley Ashurst and his designs in their proper point of view before her. As she became more occupied

for additional pupils soon offered to fill up the days already partially engaged) the poignant, bitter, ever-present grief, began to fade, both from heart and face. After all, her acquaintance with Ashurst had been but slight, and her fancy for him had not had time to root itself very deeply. In this had probably been the secret of her safety. Habit and association—these are the plummets which carry the links of love so far down into the depths of human affection, that when they are torn up again they bring with them broken shells and lifeless flowers, which till then beautified the hidden sanctums lurking under the waves of life! Besides this inevitable operation of natural causes, Madeline was very happy in the first approach to home she had ever experienced, and even happier still in the happiness she conferred, for Miss Foster, after they had been about a fortnight established together, seemed to have grown young again in appearance, and was considerably relieved from the terrible faintness and loss of breath which used to attack her after any more than ordinary exertion or excitement.

The delicious sense of freedom on first waking—the feeling that a friend was to meet her at breakfast, to think and arrange for her during the day; and have the simple meal, the delightful tea, with some substantial addition ready for her return in the evening, made a sort of Paradise of the sordid lodging; and after came a few sociable hours, spent in needlework and conversation, or reading, and always free from the *espionage*, the remarks, or the interference of any one entitled to interfere.

The want of a piano was so serious a hindrance that, after taking solemn counsel with her partner, Madeline resolved to hire one. The prices, even those at second-hand, ascertained from advertisements in the *Times* (the perusal of which each morning was an indulgence Madeline insisted Miss Foster should enjoy) being far beyond her slender resources.

"I am going on an expedition this morning, dear aunty," she said at breakfast one morning. "I shall go to Broadwood's and pay the hire of a piano for two months in advance. I shall probably get a better one at the original establishment, and then at the end of two months we shall see if I can venture to buy one, or continue to hire it—at any rate it will be paid for, and no bill to anticipate."

To which Miss Foster made her usual response—

"I am sure you are quite right, Madeline."

It was a few days after her visit to Lady Rawson, and Madeline was especially anxious to acquit herself well at that lady's intended party. Accordingly she put on her French shawl and neat little straw bonnet with white ribbons, and bright blue flowers lying on her golden hair under the brim, and placing her two precious sovereigns in her purse, sallied forth.

In Edgeware Road she stopped an omnibus going eastward. It was nearly full. An elaborately dressed gentleman, with ringlety hair, thick moustaches and hair, made room for her, with ostentatious politeness, beside him. Of course they were pressed into close contact, and Madeline thought him unnecessarily attentive in arranging the folds of her dress. A few minutes after the omnibus again stopped to take up another gentleman who hailed it from the pavement, and who, without hastening his pace, came across the street to it. He was a spare, bony-looking man, above middle size, though not very tall, the breadth of his shoulders probably detracting from his height. His prevailing colour was a deep sun-burnt brown; his hair was nearly black, and his eyes, deep-set and very dark, had a sombre, almost sad, expression. He wore long full whiskers a shade or two lighter than his hair, and thick eye-brows, but no beard or moustaches concealed the large strong jaw and somewhat wide mouth, with lips which just escaped being unpleasantly thin. Hollow temples gave a rugged look to his brow, and increased the general sternness of his aspect. He wore no gloves, and the hand that lay on his knee was long, sinewy, and thin, much embrowned, yet not without a certain refinement of shape.

Madeline observed him closely; there was an air, a bearing, about him that spoke of a life different from, and far rougher, than that of towns—and perhaps more elevating. There was little of attractive softness in his countenance, yet he looked no common man.

He took his place opposite Madeline, who appeared to have attracted his attention, for he gazed long and steadily at her out of the gloomy depths of his dark eyes. But it was not a stare to distress her; there was in it no presumption, scarce admiration, more an expression of calm contemplative curiosity. Madeline did not find it in the least embarrassing, but felt inwardly amused that the species of observation he excited in her should be apparently reciprocal. After a few minutes he removed his hat and passed his hand through the masses of his almost black straight hair, displaying a wide, though not high brow. Madeline amused herself as they went along forming theories respecting him. His social standing puzzled her. There was nothing of the conventional gentleman about him, but no one could fancy him low-born or an upstart. He more gave the impression of being the raw material of a gentleman.

As they neared the circus, Madeline's next neighbour called to the conductor to stop, and got out. A few minutes after she felt in her pocket for her purse, intending to have her fare ready when it came to her turn to leave; and lo! it was nowhere to be found. She had certainly placed it in her pocket. Could it have dropped

on the floor of the omnibus? For a moment she made an ineffectual search until she remembered that she had not had it in her hand since she entered the conveyance; so she ceased, suddenly exclaiming, "It is gone!—it is quite gone!" the colour fading from her face as she spoke. It was such a disappointment, and looked like such decided ill luck.

"Dear, dear," cried a fat, sympathetic female in a much be-feathered bonnet and a mountain of shawl over shoulders and bosom; "are you sure, ma'am, you had it in your pocket?"

"I am, indeed; yet how could I have lost it?"

"That man who sat beside you took it," said Madeline's opposite neighbour, speaking for the first time, though he had searched diligently among the straw for the missing purse. His voice was deep and strong, and had a metallic ring in it, yet it was not unpleasant; it was an honest-sounding voice. He spoke as if thoroughly convinced of the truth of what he asserted.

"Gracious goodness, sir!" exclaimed the fat woman, "did you know him?" While a bland old gentleman in green glasses began to tell of how his pocket was picked once, and a hatchet-faced cynic with a blue bag sneered out some observation about ladies being always the sufferers. Poor Madeline did not heed them. She could have wept over the misadventure, it seemed so cruel; and now a new difficulty arose in her mind, and again she uttered her thoughts aloud.

"But what shall I do to pay the conductor? I have nothing left."

"I will pay for you," said the brown man, shortly, adding with a grave smile, that nevertheless lent a wonderful charm to his sombre face, "it is no great obligation."

"Yes, it is indeed," returned Madeline earnestly, "but I accept it most gratefully. Pray tell me," she continued blushing, and with a sort of graceful awkwardness, if such an expression is permissible, "where I may enclose you stamps?"

The brown man shook his head. "You need not take the trouble. I hope you have not lost much?" he said, with an air of kindly interest.

"Only two pounds," replied Madeline with a sigh.

"Well, you are fortunate to have had so little about you," said the cynic with the blue bag.

Madeline made no reply, but looked down with a quivering lip and a full heart. Little, indeed! when her *all* was so little of a bulwark against the future with its possible wolf at the door, and no stay beyond her own bright intellect and brave heart! On raising her eyes she found those of her new friend bent upon her with a little more of warmth in their calm curiosity, and then remembering that she was but lengthening her homeward walk by

remaining in the omnibus, she requested the conductor, who was philosophising over the event upon the door step, to set her down, and repeating her acknowledgments to the stranger, descended from the vehicle.

"What grief poor Miss Foster will be in," was her first thought as she gradually collected herself. "And now I have no chance of a piano. I must get a pitch-pipe, and practise without one."

Still, it was a comfort to have poor Miss Foster to return to, though her moaning over the misfortune was, perhaps, a trifle aggravating. The fact of a gentleman—a total stranger—paying Madeline's fare was, however, a source of the deepest astonishment and interest to the excellent spinster.

"And what sort of a person was he, dear?" was her oft-repeated question. "Who could he have been? How very kind of him! He must have taken a great fancy to you! I wonder if he will try and find you out?"

"I do not fancy he would take much trouble on that score," said Madeline, laughing; "you know he refused to let me enclose him stamps, so I fancy he did not want to have anything more to say to me."

"Well! for all that, I cannot believe you have seen the last of him. It was just like a meeting in a novel. He must be very handsome."

"No, indeed, he was not. He was rather remarkable-looking, and very stern."

"I know!" exclaimed Miss Foster, with enthusiasm, "one of those proud stand-off men, who only like one or two people in the world, and are terribly zealous and devoted."

"Why, aunty, what an imagination you have! I am afraid he is nothing more than a shrewd and somewhat hard man of business, yet he certainly seemed to compassionate my loss."

"Well! we will see. It was a very curious coincidence," a favourite phrase with Miss Foster, and applied rather indiscriminately.

The next morning found the partners resigned to the loss. To advertise would have been useless, for the purse had evidently been taken with malice prepense, so, as Madeline observed, it was foolish to make themselves miserable over what was irretrievable.

"I shall probably have a note from Lady Rawson to-day or to-morrow, appointing some morning to practise with Mr. Fitzharris, and I will consult him about the pitch-pipe; if I must get a piano, I must—*coûte qui coûte*. I feel that so much depends upon my acquitting myself well at Lady Rawson's, that I am a little nervous, and very anxious about it."

To which Miss Foster replied—"I am sure I do not wonder at it, dear. But you will be sure to do well," she added, warmly, for her confidence in Madeline's powers and success was unbounded, so unbounded as to offer no manner of support to her friend's courage, for Madeline plainly saw it was a matter of faith, not reason, "besides, you know, we have plenty to go on with."

"Yes, for a few months," returned the superior partner, "but remember, after the season comes the *out* of season time, against which we must store all we can; and clothes and things wear out. There! my own dear aunty, do not look so cast down, we shall do well if we constantly remember there is but a plank between us and starvation."

"What a wonderful girl you are, Madeline! I am sure it seems but yesterday I met you at that terrible noisy station, and you seemed such a mere child, a plain little thing, with your eyes all swollen with crying, and look at you now!"

"Yes! when yours was the only voice that brought me any comfort; you the only creature that seemed to think I had a want beyond bare food and shelter; the only one who showed me sympathy in my bitter desolation! Ah, aunty! when I forget what I owe *you*, may I myself be forgotten and deserted. Courage, then! I will take care of you, and stand by you; we will weather all sorts of storms, if they come." And Madeline stamped her little foot defiantly, and her large dark eyes lit up with the fire of the brave spirit within, even while she smiled, half mockingly, at her own enthusiasm, then giving Miss Foster a hearty kiss, she departed on her morning's work.

Miss Foster also went out, after her small household arrangements were made, but her errand was a mystery, for she said nothing of it to Madeline, who did not return till near tea-time, having walked over to see Mrs. John Redman, after her music lessons were over. She found that important personage in brilliant spirits, and her usual high condition of self-satisfaction. She was very glad to see Madeline, and hear all the news she could extract.

"There is no finding out anything from that poor creature, Miss Foster," she said, "and I do want to know if it is true that Mrs. Redman never paid her anything?"

"Quite true," said Madeline.

"There now! I was quite sure of it, though John never would allow he knew anything. Men are such fools about their families, my dear! But law! what a goose she was to stay with the old lady for nothing. It is quite a nice arrangement for you, I suppose you club together?"

"Just so," returned Madeline.

"I must send for little Tommy. He is growing such a bright

little fellow. He absolutely shows a preference to me in my blue moire! think of that! Your grandma' called here the day before yesterday, she was shocking cross. Mrs. Comerford was with her; they had a brougham, and had been looking up the character of a companion, and it wouldn't suit at all. The life she leads your aunt, now she has no one to go on at at home, is *frightful*. She wasn't very civil to me. You know she is ready to die of curiosity, because I never will tell her how my money is placed, and is always thinking her son might have done better. Law, my dear! if it was only the society I have introduced him to, I am a treasure. What do you think of his being appointed director to one of the grandest companies that has ever appeared? All got up by my friends! General officers, and Royal Navy captains, and engineers, and that sort of thing!"

"Indeed!" said Madeline, with proper surprise.

"Yes, and he will make a fortune by it into the bargain. Do you ever see the *Times*? Just look at the advertisements, and you will see the—I can't exactly remember the name, the International something or other—about ships. It's quite a European concern, Mr. Blyth says. Mr. Blyth is my solicitor, and solicitor to the company; and there are Frenchmen and people in it, men in the Legion of Honour, something like our Knights of the Bath, you know. Well, if you look, you will see Mr. Redman's name between General Shuttlecock's and the Hon. Captain Featherwig, R.N."

And Mrs. John paused for breath after this rapidly-uttered harangue, and then Master Tommy was introduced, and duly admired; after which Madeline took her leave, Mrs. John promising that Mr. Redman should go and see her some Sunday.

All this was most interesting intelligence to Miss Foster, who, in truth, was always hungering, in a very undignified manner, for tidings of her former gaol and gaoler. In the depths of her simple heart she longed for a reconciliation with her old tyrant, partly, it must be confessed, that she might boast her present glorious condition of freedom and happiness under Madeline's maternal rule.

The two friends had but half finished their five o'clock tea when a sharp tap was heard at the door, and, on permission being given, Lady Rawson entered, magnificent in a rich violet brocade, with a cloak of costly sable, and a muff to match, the toilet crowned by a black velvet bonnet, with gold-tinted curled ostrich feather tips inside. Her eyes and colour alone seemed to flash light upon the tea-table, dimly lighted by two "composites," and a small though bright clean fire.

Miss Foster was positively awed by such a brilliant apparition

"How snug you look," cried Lady Rawson, gaily; "I suppose

you thought I had forgotten you, Miss Digby. I was hunting up that little wretch Fitz—Miss Foster, I presume? I know you quite well by report."

"There is very little to know about me! Will your ladyship take a cup of tea?"

"With pleasure. This is just the hour to enjoy a cup, though I see you make a serious meal of it;" for there was a dish containing slices of cold beef, neatly garnished with sprigs of parsley, on the table, and a white cloth laid.

So Lady Rawson slipped off her cloak and enjoyed her cup of tea, her eye dwelling with much kindliness from time to time on Madeline, whose real delight at being able to show her any attention was evident, while Miss Foster inwardly triumphed in the consciousness that the new teapot graced the tray.

"Well, I have caught little Fitz at last, and he will meet you at my house to-morrow at one o'clock, if you can come."

"I shall be with you; and what are we to sing?"

"That is to be decided to-morrow. Meantime you must practise well at home. I want you to make a sensation. Where is your piano?"

"I am sorry to say I have not one. I intended to hire one, but going yesterday to select it, my pocket was picked, so I must try and practise with a pitch-pipe. I suppose that will do?"

"No, it will not," said Lady Rawson, bluntly; "besides, your hand will get out. I tell you what, Miss Digby, I will give you a piano."

"My dear Lady Rawson! pray remember that I am a stranger, without the slightest claim upon you, and really you ought not to hurry into an act of such unusual generosity without due reflection."

"Which means that you think me an impulsive goose—'a fool and his money soon parted'—eh! mademoiselle?" said Lady Rawson, laughing good-humouredly."

"No, no! no, indeed! simply that you are too good," returned Madeline, colouring.

"And *you* too proud to accept obligation from a well-wisher. My dear girl! I am not going to give you a two hundred guinea Erard, so let me have my own way. I wanted to help you, so submit."

"If you are so determined, let me at least assure you that I am conscious of the very great benefit you will bestow. I was, in truth, at my wit's end with disappointment. How delightful to have a piano. And all my own! Will it not be delightful, aunty?"

"I am sure I never heard of anything like it!" exclaimed Miss Foster, in a confusion of pleasure and gratitude, and pride in

Madeline's power to attract friends. "But Madeline is a most fortunate girl! See how that gentleman paid your omnibus fare yesterday."

"What gentleman?" asked Lady Rawson.

Whereupon Miss Foster related the circumstances attending Madeline's loss.

"A *preux chevalier*," said her ladyship, rising; "after all, though, it did not require a vast amount of chivalry to pay fourpence or sixpence for a pretty girl in distress! Good-bye, my dear Miss Digby, I shall not forget the piano. Good evening, Miss Foster, I am glad to make your acquaintance—at one then to-morrow."

And Lady Rawson plunged rapidly down stairs, followed by Madeline, who saw her safe into her carriage. As she returned she encountered the landlady, who was waiting to speak to her at the foot of the stairs, in a condition of the utmost blandness.

"I'm sure, mum, I am truly sorry as that unmannerly gurl Hemma let the lady walk up to your room without hever shewing her the way, and she that dirty! in spite of all I say, and the help she gets—is aggravating! and I hope you will look over it."

"Oh! certainly, Mrs. Rumble. I do not suppose Lady Rawson minded, and Emma is a good obliging girl."

"Lady *who*, did you say, mum?" asked Mrs. Rumble, with a slight tinge of awe in her tone.

"Lady Rawson," repeated Madeline, smiling at the change wrought in the landlady by the splendid apparition of a "ladyship" in a carriage, and attended by a footman.

"Well, Madeline," said Miss Foster, decidedly, when she re-entered the sitting-room, "you may say what you like, but I am quite sure you will marry, or make your fortune, or do something quite wonderful among these fine people. Why I never knew such a woman as this Lady Rawson. She must be as rich as a Jew. And no relation! It's just what your grandmamma ought to have done, to give you a piano. But dear, dear! though it's far from right to judge, she *is* over fond of money! But I am certain that silk her ladyship had on cost twelve shillings a yard if it cost a penny, and *such* a sable cloak! and what a nice, affable, agreeable person," added Miss Foster, who, like most of her class, possessed a mild amount of flunkeyism, though of a simple honest kind. "But don't you think," she continued, with some hesitation, "that she has a sort of a likeness to Mrs. John?"

"Mrs. John Redman? Oh no! yet after all there is a look—they have a sort of physical resemblance, only Lady Rawson is furnished with one or two items omitted in Mrs. John—brains and a heart."

CHAPTER XXVI.

LITTLE FITZ was really glad to see Madeline, and heartily desirous to serve her; she proved too a welcome antidote to the disturbing influence of Lady Rawson, so the practising progressed very favourably, and the amiable hostess was no mean judge of the "concord of sweet sounds."

"I think you will both do me infinite credit on Tuesday," she said, as they sat down to one of the exquisite luncheons for which her ladyship was famous. "I fancy I shall have more people than I expected. I meet fresh ones every day, and ask them without written invitations. In short society is a pleasant republican affair before Easter. We are all, morally speaking, in our *robes de chambre*, and don't put on the *grande tenue* till the drawing-rooms begin; then there is so little going on, everyone is disengaged, and obliged to you for asking them; your friends the Templemores are coming, Miss Digby."

"Indeed," returned Madeline, her heart beating a little faster with the memories this name called up.

"And I met another of the Grange set yesterday," said Mr. Fitzharris, "Lord Hexham."

"Oh! indeed," cried Lady Rawson, "have you heard about the will? How has the old lord left him?"

"I believe sole heir to everything, except a few trifling legacies. He must be very wealthy, one of the best catches in London this season, and really a fine-looking fellow, a perfect gentleman. He was asking for you, Lady Rawson, and I assure you made honourable mention of Miss Digby's singing with me, and remembered how well our voices suited," added little Fitz, evidently thinking it was *his* performance that stamped Miss Digby on Lord Hexham's mind.

Madeline by this time knew that Dudley Ashurst was the subject of conversation, and with some difficulty kept her face from speaking the emotion she felt. Had he then carelessly and incidentally named her to a casual acquaintance, while she could not without the strongest effort mention him even to a friend so kind and judicious as Lady Rawson—surely theirs were different stakes in the game of life. And now that the only obstacle (according to his own showing) to their marriage was removed by the death of his grandfather, would he seek her out and prove the truth of the affection he had so passionately professed. "Ah no! the real obstacle, the difference of station, of social value, remains the same," she thought, and a smile of bitter scorn of herself—of him—of the laws which govern civilised life—wreathed her lips.

Lady Rawson glanced at her, and quickly changed the subject. "I wish you two could practise a little more together before Tuesday, and I am so engaged I really cannot play propriety for you again. Why shouldn't Mr. Fitzharris go to your lodgings, Madeline? Miss Foster is an excellent *chaperon*, and you would work better, I daresay, than here."

"I should be delighted to see Mr. Fitzharris," said Madeline.

"And *I* to be at your service," returned the little man gallantly.

"When may I call?" Madeline gave him her address and settled for the next morning but one. Then Lady Rawson discussed a few more details as to the music to be performed at her house, and finally dismissed Mr. Fitzharris, and took Madeline home in the carriage.

She found Miss Foster in a state of radiant delight. During her absence the piano had arrived; it was a cottage piano, in a very plain case of polished deal, but of an excellent tone, and with all the modern improvements.

Madeline was pleased, yet not so joyously excited as she would have been had not the conversation at luncheon brought back to her something of that gnawing, aching hunger of the heart, which of late the new interest of her life had relieved.

She slowly removed her bonnet and shawl, scarce hearing the very particular description given by Miss Foster of the difficulties attending the removal of the "instrument" from the van to the second floor; the agonies of Mrs. Rumble respecting her banisters, and her wonderful civility through it all. To Miss Foster the "good time so long in coming," had evidently dawned at last, and to her satisfied heart promised an eternal millennium.

Madeline, after folding and putting away her things with mechanical neatness, sat down, with her hands pressed to her brow, to think and to do battle with herself.

First to crush out the shadowy hope that Ashurst would find her and ask her to be his wife; this, while common sense showed its absurdity, shook her strength, and disturbed the conviction of his worldliness, which was her best armour.

"Madeline dear! have you a headache?"

"No aunty, just let me alone for a minute or two like a dear, I am making a calculation."

Whereupon Miss Foster was silent, and crept noiselessly about the room as if Madeline's life depended on her being still. In a few moments Madeline dropped her hands, determined that instant action was the best means of regaining self-control, and calling to her companion to come and help her, proceeded to unpack and arrange her music, and then practised till tea-time.

"I am sure it is quite cheerful to hear you, and will you not sing a little, dear, I am not sure that I ever heard you sing."

"To-morrow, aunty dear; and now give me a nice hot cup of tea, for my head *does* ache a little."

When the culprit Emma came to remove the tray, she brought with her the *Times*.

"Oh! I forgot to tell you," said Miss Foster in reply to an inquiring look from Madeline, "I told the boy to bring it in the evening, I have not time to read it in the morning, and now you can see it too; besides—it is still more unlike Abingdon Villas to have it in the evening, very foolish of me I dare say."

"But perfectly natural," said Madeline.

"And only half price at this hour," added Miss Foster; "now I must look for that company with Mr. John's name in it, you were telling me of. I did look yesterday but could not find it, to be sure I was rather hurried."

Madeline went to fetch some necessary needlework, for she was her own milliner and dressmaker, and on returning was greeted triumphantly.

"Here it is, the very thing, and his name in full! There is a great deal about it, they are going to supply the whole of Europe with ships. It is too long to read, but here is the list of directors. 'Mr. Neilson, of Stapleford and Broad Street, City; Mr. Jobling (Jobling, Scratchet & Co.), Crabtree Court, City; General Shuttlecock; Mr. John Redman, Size Lane and Warwick Gardens; the Hon. Captain Featherwig, R.N. (Director of the South Australian Grand Trunk Line Railway Company); Mons. Maisonneuf, Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur, G.C.S.G., F.R.G.S., &c.' That must be a remarkable man," observed Miss Foster in parenthesis, "I wonder what all these letters mean?"

"Heaven knows!" said Madeline, laughing, "let me see—'G.C.S.G.,' *Grande Croix de la Société Galérienne*, perhaps."

"Perhaps so," returned Miss Foster gravely. "Then comes 'Kinshella O'Keefe, Esq., Consul for the States of Fireandtow, South America, President of the Entomological Society of Buenos Ayres, and Director of the Cordilleras Railway.' I must say it appears a very distinguished company altogether. And here is another acquaintance of yours I think—Principal Engineer, Mr. Arthur Downing.—Solicitors, Messrs. Harridge and Blyth, Chancery Lane.'"

"Arthur Downing! I suppose it must be a very good appointment for him; well, I trust it may increase dear Jessie's happiness. I must write and ask her all about it. And 'Blyth!' I seem to remember that name. Mrs. John mentioned it, but besides that I think I know it; yes, that was the name of the man Mrs. Redman sent down to Gravesend to inquire about me, who spoke so rudely to Kit, and treated us all with such contempt Ah! dear aunty, how I should like to see Kit again! Were I to

meet him you would not mind having him to tea; would you, dear? He was so good to me!"

"Certainly not, any one who has been good to you would be welcome to me," returned Miss Foster turning over the paper as she spoke, "though an actor, you know, Madeline." Here something caught her eye, and she exclaimed, "Goodness gracious! listen to this, Madeline!"

"'If the lady, who lost her purse in a Paddington omnibus, on Wednesday last, between the Marble Arch and the Circus, will call on Mr. H. E., No. 5, Friar's Lane, Second Floor, King William Street, she may hear of something to her advantage.'"

"Show it to me," exclaimed Madeline, sharing, though in a less degree, her friend's excitement.

"I told you," said Miss Foster triumphantly, "you had not seen the last of him."

"Who?"

"Why the gentleman who paid your fare in the omnibus."

"It might be one of the other gentlemen, aunty! But oh dear me! I do hope he has some tidings of my purse—suppose I found it, and had my piano besides! However, I think he would have put something about it, if he had any trace of the purse. 'Something to my advantage!' what can that be?"

"Well, you must go to-morrow at all events."

"Not to-morrow, you know that is my busy day, and I do not think it would do to call. Had I not better write? If it is a hoax it would be less mortifying to unveil it by letter."

"A hoax, indeed!" repeated Miss Foster, rather indignantly, "I declare, Madeline, sometimes you are too suspicious! Depend upon it, it is a determined attempt of the Brown Man (as you call him) to find you out and propose for you."

"My dear aunty, how you romance! My poor Brown Man looked perfectly sane! But I will write to him, certainly. There may be a chance of recovering my purse under the odd wording of that advertisement. But how shall I write—present my compliments, I suppose? I will do it at once."

Laying aside her work, Madeline took out her writing materials, and in a few minutes read aloud the following to her friend:—

"Miss Digby presents her compliments to Mr. H. E. She has seen his advertisement in this day's *Times*, and presumes she is the lady in question. She would be very grateful for any tidings that might lead to the recovery of her purse, as it has been a sad loss. Miss Digby regrets that her engagements will prevent her going to the City for a length of time, she will therefore be much obliged by a written communication on the subject.

"No. 14, Kent Terrace, New Road."

"There, aunty! will that do? you see I have put the full address, and let him see *what* a loss the purse is; better he should think us utterly poor than not exert himself about it."

"Certainly, Madeline, but it might have been a large sum."

"Oh, no! he knows it was only two sovereigns."

"Well, I am sure it is a very nice note, Madeline, but I wonder how he will get it with only his initials, the City offices are such crowded places."

"That is his affair," said Madeline, closing her note; "we can only act to the best of our judgment and wait the result."

"Well, I am sure it is all most extraordinary," concluded Miss Foster.

Mr. Fitzharris was very punctual to his appointment with Madeline, and produced a most favourable impression upon Miss Foster. He was (when in good humour) a polite, suave little man, and so accustomed to assert himself in the presence of those greatly above him in importance, that he felt quite a glow of benevolence in the society of those who weighed still lighter in the social scale than himself.

Miss Foster had arrayed herself in her second best dress, best apron and cap, and wore as spotless cuffs and collar as in the old days of martyrdom at Abingdon Villas; she looked a thoroughly ladylike, respectable old maid, the ideal *chaperon* for such a girl as Madeline. She had almost furnished herself with a piece of most genteelly useless knitting, stockings, under-garments, and half-turned skirts being put out of sight. And Mrs. Rumble, in compliment to the unusual visits of a ladyship, and perhaps the brighter sun of advancing spring, had bestowed clean, though somewhat skimped, white muslin curtains, so that with the piano, and a few books, the second floor front did not look so bad.

Mr. Fitzharris brought a nosegay with him, violets and crocusses, much to the delight of the partners, so the practising went on most successfully, and Miss Foster listened enraptured,

Yet Madeline was fighting a battle with herself. She longed to start little Fitz on the topic of Dudley Ashurst, as she knew she could by a word. Yes, she pined to hear of him, though his name sent a thrill of pain through her heart, but she resisted bravely.

She looked round her little territory, she thought of the kind friends that had risen for her, and she lifted her heart in gratitude to the Giver of all good, resolved to look forward hopefully, nor let herself sink into that desponding disregard of the future which had for a while weighed her down.

Lady Rawson's musical party was fixed for the following Tuesday, so Madeline and little Fitz could but practise once more pre-

vious to it, but now she had seen and talked with him, and heard his friendly praise, she felt more equal to the ordeal which was before her.

The City was "all alive" with the full tide of the mid-day throng, yet the nooks and corners where strong eddies of business whirl the straws of commerce round so often and so fast that they turn into gold at last, were quiet enough. In one of these bye-places, up two or three flights of dingy stairs, with a pathway of lead up the middle of them, were a couple of dingy rooms; one, a many-angled slice from the inner chamber, wherein was an iron safe, a large desk, and a small clerk, a dried-up, keen-eyed, elderly man. Within, a partially glazed door led into a larger and more lightsome apartment, better, though still poorly furnished, with cocoa-nut matting, two or three chairs, and a desk, very substantial but very ancient. At the desk sat a brown-looking man, about thirty-five or forty years of age, with a rugged brow and deep-set sombre eyes—Madeline's deliverer from her difficulties in the omnibus, in short. His head was resting on his left hand, and the right held his pen suspended over a sheet half covered with even lines, written in a firm massive hand. He sat in deep thought, pondering some question, big with results of £ *s. d.* It was a strong face, somewhat hard perhaps, yet not without a certain pathos in its expression, a look as if, after much toil and welfare, he wanted rest. But this was only when quite alone. When the clerk entered and laid two cards before him, jerking out the words, "Want to see you," the countenance was suddenly locked up, as it were, into its ordinary business-like severity.

"Who is it?" he said, mechanically laying down his pen.

"Can't say—strangers," returned the laconic clerk.

His employer took up the cards and read: "'Mr. H. C. Blyth.' Don't know him. 'Mr. Arthur Downing, Engineer, International and Colonial Iron Ship-building Company.' Oh! send them in."

Enter accordingly our acquaintance Mr. Downing, as neat and wide-awake as ever, followed by a tall, well-dressed, almost rakish-looking man, with a large seal ring on his little finger and a close-reefed umbrella in an oilskin cover.

"Well, Mr. Elliott, it is a long time since we met; you scarcely remember Downing at Liverpool? Osborn Iron Works, Birkenhead?"

"Oh!" returned Mr. Elliott, deliberately, "I do remember you, Mr. Downing. Glad to see you again," and they shook hands.

"I have called on you," resumed Mr. Downing, "to renew the acquaintance, and introduce Mr. Blyth, who wishes to know you."

The gentlemen bowed, and the two visitors sat down facing Mr. Elliott, who was intrenched in an arm-chair behind his knee-hole desk.

"Well, I have called," began Mr. Blyth, jauntily, "to speak to you on a little matter that is worth your attention. You have probably seen our prospectus?"

"I have seen a good many," returned Elliott, drily. "Which is yours?"

"There is our title," said Mr. Blyth, pointing to Mr. Downing's card, "and I have the honour to be solicitor to the company. Our object is to supply a crying want, necessitated by the enormous demands of the carrying trade, by supplying iron cargo vessels at prices hitherto unattainable. For this purpose," continued the accomplished solicitor, somewhat oratorically, as if he was addressing a general meeting, "it is our intention to purchase, at a cheap rate, iron mines hitherto neglected or but partially worked on the Continent and in the Colonies, and by employing native labour under English direction (a complimentary wave of the hand towards Mr. Downing) accomplish our ends at half the usual cost."

"Hum;" ejaculated Mr. Elliott.

"We have already arranged on the most advantageous terms for the purchase of the mines of—of—I can't remember these names." Drawing forth a large packet of papers, and selecting one, he rapidly skimmed it. "Hum! Ten per cent.—permission of the Emperor. Oh, ah! here it is. The mines of 'Loup Garrou,' near the village of 'Croque Mittaine, on the coast of Brittany.' They have already, with very insufficient machinery, proved most productive, and, properly worked, will yield *enor*mous profits."

"I understand," said Mr. Elliott.

"We have already," resumed the orator, "secured an admirable board—just look over the names (handing him a prospectus); but there is room for one more, and as you are well known in connection with our Australian colonies, and it is our intention to develope the mineral resources of that country, we should be glad of your co-operation and assistance."

"Much obliged," returned Mr. Elliott, looking down on the paper, and noting the names of the directors. "Neilson," he continued, with an inquiring look at Downing, "he was junior with Jones Robinson at the Osborne works?"

"The same. He has now the great iron factories at Stapleford. I have been with him for a year and a half before I got this appointment. First-rate fellow; name a guarantee for any concern," concluded Mr. Downing, with off-hand assurance.

"John Redman," said Mr. Elliott, continuing his examination, unmoved by this eulogy. "*He* is a respectable, substantial man. Shuttlecock, I know that name," with a sort of grim smile to Mr. Blyth—"one of your stock generals, in a good many companies, eh, sir?" Mr. Blyth laughed knowingly.

"Useful, Mr. Elliott, useful. Generals give an air of respectability—shareholders like generals and honourables."

"Captain Featherwig, Director of the South Australian Grand Trunk Railway Company; never heard of a railway in South Australia before."

"Works not completed," threw in Mr. Blyth; "but that is no affair of ours."

"These iron mines in Brittany—how do you know they are productive?"

"Oh, we have a French inspector—a remarkably intelligent fellow—who has given us a splendid report of them. He is in London just now. You could see him at any time. In short, it is a *bonâ fide* affair, nearly all the capital paid up. You see as you are already, I understand, possessed of some property in Australia, and we propose to work mines there, it would probably be more in your way than many others, to become a director—of course the qualification might be arranged. Some names are of sufficient value to the shareholders to render a slight deviation from formalities not only allowable, but advisable; besides, my friend Downing informs me your knowledge and experience in shipping is great, and might be turned to excellent account, both for yourself and us, to say nothing of the possibility of an iron mine turning up on your own land."

"I no longer hold land in the colony," said Elliott; "and though I am much obliged to you for your liberal (this word slightly accented) offers, I must decline. I by no meant share the present rage for companies, though I admit the principle is a good one, so you must recruit elsewhere."

Here the laconic clerk looked in—"Beg pardon, sir—this for you?"

"Yes," said Elliott, glancing at a small unbusiness-like note presented to him. He took it and laid it beside him on the desk. "Your company may turn out very successful—I have no doubt it will in some ways; but I have quite enough to do to mind my own business."

"As you will then," said Mr. Blyth, rising and putting up his papers, still with the same jaunty air; "but you will repent your decision, Mr. Elliott. Downing, I must leave you here. I have to go to Somerset House as quick as I can. Good morning, Mr. Elliott."

"Good morning," returned that gentleman, escorting him politely to the outer door.

"Well, Elliott," said Mr. Downing, whom he found standing with his back to the fire, "you have got on first-rate since we met."

"I do not complain," returned Elliott, coldly, as if reluctant to encourage the familiarity of his former acquaintance.

"It was some time," resumed Mr. Downing, "before I knew that the Australian Elliott I heard them talking of was yourself. Why, let me see, you were just going out as chief officer of the Queen of the South twelve years ago, when I last saw you, and I was then quite a youngster."

"Just so," said Elliott. "I made the return voyage, and then left the sea; and you, Mr. Downing, what have you been doing?" He spoke with a frigid politeness, well calculated to repress the audacious familiarity of the other.

"Oh, I have not been doing badly, though I have been guilty of one piece of folly, for I married about a year ago, and I have a small responsibility in the shape of a boy some three weeks old; but I think this appointment will be the making of me. I say, Mr. Elliott, I wish you would join us. It is a first-rate concern."

"Don't like it. It may be all right; but there's a shaky look about it."

"You'll see we shall all make fortunes."

"I hope so; meantime I shall be glad to see you whenever you look in; but at present—" a glance at the letters lying on his desk filled up the blank.

"Oh, I'm off! Time's money, I know. I will look in again and see if you won't think better of our company."

So Mr. Downing departed. Then Elliott took up the little note. It bore a delicate blue seal, and was directed in a small but firm hand, every letter perfectly formed. It had a faint perfume, something like the scent of hyacinths on the air. Elliott examined the seal and the direction with a pleasant smile, as though laughing at himself, and then carefully and deliberately opened and read it. He thought a moment, and then returning Madeline's note (of course it was Madeline's note) to its envelope, he placed it in his pocket, took his other letters, locked up his face, and once more threw himself heart and soul into his business, working away with fixed attention and clear concentrated purpose, till his two tired clerks (his was a modest establishment) shut up, took his last directions, and left him in the half light fighting with the tail end of an unfinished calculation. An hour later, and he sat at dinner in his very comfortable lodgings in the Bayswater suburb. Elliott was a lover of realities. He did not care for finery, but he liked essentials; and the respectable female who "had seen better days," and from whom he had rented the upper part of a tolerably large house, cooked and managed for him with anxious care, scarce warranted by the moderate remuneration punctually paid for her accommodation and outlay.

A neat servant waited obsequiously—there was a latent power about this hard silent man that made women serve him well, and even influenced while it repressed his fellow men. Then, to be

sure, he had the reputation of success—of possessing that contradictory combination of caution and boldness, so rare in men of business. So Mr. Elliott ate his dinner in silence, save when he sternly ordered away a cruet-stand not polished to a proper pitch of brilliancy; and then he lay back in one chair, and put his feet upon another, and having filled a glass with soft, silky, ruby port of great value, he took out Madeline's little note and re-perused it.

"I suppose she is right not to come herself; yet if she was in great distress I think she would," he thought. "It is curious how the look of sorrow in those large dark eyes haunts me. It is a weakness, probably! Still if I can help her I will. Poor little thing! It must be hard work for women to get on alone. There must be many who have no fathers, or brothers, or husbands, to help them. I am glad Mary married. What should I have done with her? Women are such odd, fanciful concerns!—especially proper sort of women. I don't think that girl is a humbug! But if she is I shall find out by going to see her."

So musing, he drew out and lighted a large and fragrant cigar, then he replaced Madeline's little note in his pocket, and reached down a tough book on political economy, in which he became absorbed.

Hugh Elliott came of a good Border family. His father, a clergyman of no common ability, educated him carefully till he was between twelve and thirteen, and then died, leaving him and his sister Mary friendless and penniless. Hugh, naturally bold, and accustomed to the hardy sports and exercises of a remote seaside district, turned to the sea, and started on his own account in the not very distinguished berth of "boy" on board a merchant ship, whence, by steadiness and conduct, backed by an unusually good education, he soon worked himself clear of the tar bucket. His sister, through the kindly exertions of a substantial farmer, was admitted into a provincial school, and from it married the clerk of some neighbouring coal mines.

Life had been one battle with Elliott, and for the last two or three years the tide against which he had swum so long and so bravely, turned in his favour, and the small savings of former days had doubled and trebled. He was an ambitious man—ambitious after the deliberate and intense fashion of his granite nature. To have a first-rate reputation among men of his own class, to found a great house of business, perhaps to represent the little sea-port from whence he once started as a sailor boy: these were his day dreams.

His had been a solitary existence, and its effect was to harden a nature strong indeed, but by no means originally denuded of sympathy or tenderness. Of female influence he had known nothing.

He had not much fancied the specimens of the fair sex with which his roving life had brought him in contact. In short, though somewhat unpolished, under Hugh Elliott's rough exterior lurked the indigenous delicacy of a gentleman, and, though a trifle selfish from loneliness and dormant feeling, there was no material in his composition capable of being worked down into coarseness. Fire, it is true, might be struck from the flint of his nature—but it would be a clear burning, bright flame.

He liked money. In his experience it had shown itself the world's master. All things that he had ever known had recognised its power, and yet it had brought him little pleasure. But did he want pleasure? Could he understand enjoyment? He thought not. But the great Creator who gave us the rocks, and the flowers that grow thereon, the rugged iron, and the beauteous gem, He knows that each soul needs full development, the flower and the gem, the rock and the iron, or the whole being is incomplete.

Miss Foster and Madeline were in their sitting-room the next evening; Madeline had been practising, and was now striking long dreamy arpeggio chords, while Miss Foster was busily occupied setting forth the tea-tray. The bouquet presented by Mr. Fitzharris was prettily set out in a basket on the table, and a certain tone of feminine nicety pervaded the humble sitting-room. A knock, followed by the entrance of "Hemma," attracted Miss Foster's attention. The "slavey" held a card, a fold of her apron being dexterously introduced between her fingers and the snowy pasteboard.

"Dear me! I suppose this is the gentleman himself come to call," said Miss Foster, presenting the card to her partner.

It bore the name of "Mr. Hugh Elliott."

"No doubt," returned Madeline. "How good of him," and her cheek flushed with pleased gratitude. "Show him up, Emma."

"He is just outside, Miss," and Hugh Elliott entered, or rather paused upon the threshold, for a few paces in front of the door stood Madeline, the exquisitely graceful outline of her little figure, in its close-fitting black silk dress, and her wavy golden hair, through which a violet ribbon was carelessly passed, tying back its rich abundance, thrown into strong relief by the vivid sunset light streaming through the window behind her.

It was one of those accidental pictures that stamp themselves indelibly on the memory. In all the changes of after years that first impression never left Hugh Elliott's imagination—where Madeline was for ever associated with a blaze of sunset glory, just touched by the tender streak of harmonious violet peeping through the meshes of her hair.

"And you have come yourself to find me," she exclaimed, holding out her little hand with the innocent frankness natural to her. "How kind of you! Miss Foster, this is the gentleman who rescued me from my predicament when I lost my purse."

Miss Foster, looking a very type of lady-like primness, smiled most benignly.

Elliott felt a little bewildered. The situation was a new one to him. He took the hand held out to him, vaguely seeing how small, and white, and round it was, contrasted with his, so brown, and long, and bony. Then he bowed to Miss Foster, and she asked him to sit down, which he did, whereupon a rather awkward pause ensued.

Elliott glanced round the room. It was rather shabby when more closely looked at, yet there were no symptoms of absolute poverty, and he hesitated to declare his errand, the ostensible reason (in which he himself firmly and honestly believed) which brought him to Kent Terrace. However, he thought that he would just state the truth. To this rectangular nature the fine feelings and morbid niceties that resent a suspicion of poverty, or the intention to do a real service, if not clothed "in purple and fine linen," were simply incomprehensible; and intrenching himself in his honesty of purpose, he grew more at ease.

"I scarcely dare to hope you have any tidings of my purse," began Madeline, after waiting for him to take the initiative in vain, while Miss Foster, without any question, poured him out a cup of tea, and Madeline offered him some toast.

"I have not," returned Elliott, unflinchingly. "Indeed, where it only contained sovereigns, coin, there is little or no chance of finding it."

"Ah!" said Madeline, her face changing visibly, whereupon Elliott took up the thread of the argument, his dark face colouring slightly.

"I fear it was a serious loss, a great inconvenience; I saw it by your face that day; and thinking over the matter," he continued, his hesitation vanishing before his sincere intention to do well and kindly, "I was very sorry I did not speak to you at the time, and as I always try to repair a mistake as soon as possible, when I make one, I put that advertisement in the *Times*."

"I am sure it was very thoughtful," said Miss Foster, seeing Madeline, who guessed what was coming, pause; "but how——"

"Just hear me," interrupted Elliott, "my idea was to ask if I could in any way assist you, if the loss caused any very serious annoyance."

"How?" asked Madeline, colouring.

"In the only way assistance could be of any use," returned Hugh in his usual dry manner, "by lending you the sum lost,

which you could have repayed by instalments, or in any way you like."

"And you have sought us out to offer us this great service," said Madeline, thoughtfully, her grandmother's icy indifference rising up in strong contrast before her mind's eye, "you, a stranger!"

"Well! it really is no great service; at least nothing very particular for me, and it might be very useful to you."

"And I thought you looked a cold, hard man," continued Madeline, resting her elbow on the table, and her cheek on her hand, looking steadily with her clear truthful eyes at their guest, speaking out her thoughts, with a wondrous charming boldness, so soft, yet so daring; "and you are in reality so good."

"No!" said Elliott smiling and colouring under her gaze, with a strange quickening of the pulse he could not understand, "your first estimate of me was the correct one. I am hard, at least what women would call hard, I suppose, but not therefore quite without feeling; and now do you accept my offer?"

"No, certainly not," returned Madeline, with a smile, almost caressing in its sweetness, "it is really not needed! I do not refuse from any silly pride, but I will tell you all about it. I am a teacher of music and languages, only a month or two set up in housekeeping with this dear old friend," laying her hand on Miss Foster's. "We have but a small capital, and out of it, after much deliberation, I took two sovereigns that day I met you, intending to hire a piano for a little time and pay in advance. When I lost my purse I was in despair, because I could not get a piano, and practice is essential to a professor, you know. But see," pointing to the piano, "a kind friend hearing of my loss gave me that one; perhaps you know her, she is well known in London, Lady Rawson?"

"No," returned Elliott, bluntly, "I know no ladyships."

"Well! I am rich now you see," resumed Madeline, "for I have the piano as a possession, my loss is amply restored, therefore, your most generous, most friendly assistance is not needed."

"I see," said Elliott rather ungraciously. He felt unreasonably annoyed that another had forestalled him, yet he had left the City that afternoon mentally out of patience with himself for yielding to the strange attraction which drew him (against his natural, cautious bias) to seek out a possibly penniless stranger, who might prove a costly annoyance. There was an atmosphere about these two quiet women, different from anything he had hitherto breathed, which seemed suddenly to develope in him a capacity for new things; the home-like look of the room in which they sat, the refinement of their bearing, the beauty of form and colour which distinguished Madeline, steeped him

in an undefined sense of pleasure he recognised but could not analyze.

"You seemed quite sure," said Madeline after a few observations on the weather, and the last news from Miss Foster, "you seemed to have no doubt that the man who sat beside me took my purse?"

"Not the least, he had the look of a thief. I have seen plenty of fine gentlemen of his stamp, working in gangs in Australia."

"You have probably been a great traveller?" said Madeline, stretching out her hand for his tea-cup.

"I have been a good deal at sea, but that hardly constitutes travelling, you are shut up with Englishmen, and only have glimpses of seaports now and then."

"Pray may I ask, Mr. Elliott, are you from the North?" asked Miss Foster, with extreme politeness, "your accent sounds familiar to my ear."

"Yes, I am a borderer. I come from a district known to the country people by the name of Elliott's Dale."

"Indeed," cried Miss Foster, with some excitement, "I come from that part of the country myself. Do you know a place called Bardsleigh Hall, near Allingham?"

"I do know it well," returned Elliott, with more animation than he had yet shown. "It leads away from the village to the upland moors."

"I never was there," said Miss Foster, "but I have heard of it often, it belonged to my grandfather."

"Indeed, that's curious! My father was vicar of Allingham, and my grandmother a Foster of Bardsleigh."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Miss Foster, quite tremulous with surprise and excitement. "Why, I remember often hearing my poor father speak of a sister who married one of the Holme Elliotts. I suppose then we must be cousins? what an extraordinary coincidence."

"It is indeed curious, dear aunty," said Madeline sympathetically.

"Cousins! yes, of course we are," cried Elliot with unusual cordiality. "And though I left that part of the country a mere lad, I fancy I have never seen its like since. I am very glad to have found a kinswoman; and this young lady, is she a cousin too?"

"Alas! no!" returned Madeline with a bright smile. "I can boast no north country blood." Miss Foster and her newly discovered relative found many people to inquire about. But as Elliott had left so young, and Miss Foster only knew the place and its inhabitants by report, their questions and replies were rather vague, the principal information being supplied by Miss Foster,

who told Elliott that her nephew was now vicar of Allingham, being the third who had held it since his father's decease.

Madeline listened with much interest, observing the deep feeling for his early home which ran through all Elliott said, though at intervals harder strata of thought cropped up and drove back her sympathies chilled and shivering. As to Miss Foster, she was in a state of unbounded satisfaction.

"Dear, dear!" she exclaimed at intervals, "I am sure it's quite like a novel, the most extraordinary coincidence."

At length Mr. Elliott rose to take his leave.

"Good-bye," said Madeline, again laying her little hand into his long thin brown one, "I shall never, never forget your generous thought for one you imagined was poor and friendless; you little fancied you were going to help a relative, for you know Miss Foster and I have taken each other for 'richer for poorer,' we are real partners, only she has something and *I* nothing."

"No, no, dear!" cried Miss Foster, "that is not fair, you can earn something, and I nothing."

"*N'importe*," returned Madeline with innocent coquetry, "you'll come and see the *firm* again, Mr. Elliott?"

"I will," he returned, knitting his brow grimly in the strong resolution to visit them often, and producing thereby rather an appalling effect, which elicited a little nervous twittering "I am sure we shall be delighted to see you" from Miss Foster, and then he again shook hands with Madeline in a confused manner, and departed.

"Dearest aunty," cried Madeline rubbing her little hand, "your cousin is a very Samson, he has nearly crushed my poor fingers, and didn't seem the least aware of it. He is really a formidable relative, but what a good fellow! He was so in earnest with his generous offer, though he rather threw it at one's head."

"Well I am sure, Madeline, he is quite the gentleman, and I should say handsome; altogether, I feel as if my breath was taken away. Such an extraordinary coincidence, first about the purse and the advertisement, and then turning out a relation! Mark my words, Madeline, he has fallen in love with you, and I only hope you will not treat him like poor Mr. Samuel Moorcroft."

"That stony borderer in love! Oh, aunty! what fever of the imagination has seized upon you? No, no! he is not made of inflammable materials, kind as he has shown himself. I imagine that business is the god of his idolatry. Nevethcless he has shown *us* a soft side."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MADELINE felt some trepidation as she put the last touches to her simple toilette, the evening of Lady Rawson's party. Yet she felt conscious that the effect of the trial through which she had passed had strengthened her morally. She was now anxious for success in a purely business point of view; but from the half-joyous, half-fearful anticipation of a young girl who feels she is on the very threshold of her history, she was free. One page of her life had been turned, and at present she felt as if a similar one could never again be unrolled.

Enough, however, of emotion was left to tinge her cheek with colour, and lend animation to her looks. By arrangement with Lady Rawson, she arrived early, and already occupied a quiet nook near the piano, when the company began to arrive. To her it was all very new; she had never been at a party before. The shouting out of the names, the variety of costumes, the eccentric head-dresses of some—supremely fashionable individuals—the freemasonry and shibboleth with which all seemed familiar, outward and visible signs of enrolment in the world of distinction and notoriety, all struck her keen bright fancy, as partly imposing, partly ludicrous. The men, in her eyes, seemed like weak washed-out copies of Dudley Ashurst; yet they were gentlemen, inoffensive, if not very original, and widely different from the odious Downing type.

Little Fitz soon made out Madeline, and with a kindly feeling established himself at her side, pointing out the notorieties, and otherwise doing the agreeable.

"There, Miss Digby, you see that long, thin man, with ringletty hair, and no chin, that is Disbrow, the famous orator of the House. There, that small man with the big head, like a cod, that's Tinkleson, the great poet; and that thick-looking man, with a sort of lion's mane of hair and beard, that's Hayward, the hope of the Turks and the liberals; he is so generous, he would give anyone liberty to have anything they like, even half-a-dozen wives, but Eastern life has made that 'no objection;' they say he has discovered the jaws of the original whale that swallowed Jonah! Now look at that tall, fair woman, with no *corsage* worth mentioning—that is the Hon. Mrs. Otterson, a poetess and woman of fashion; she is at everything, keeps a magazine of tracts and medicines for the poor, and makes a book on the Derby. They say she is going to give a series of lectures on the condition of women, at the Polytechnic, this season."

"What an active person," said Madeline.

"Yes!" said little Fitz; "modern women of fashion work hard in their vocation."

The larger part of the guests being assembled, the performances commenced by two dishevelled, gloomy-looking men, one fair and the other dark, coming to the front, the fair one clutched a violin, and the dark misanthrope, as he seemed, struck a vindictive blow on a deplorable minor chord on the piano, with the left hand, and galloped wildly up to the top keys with the right; then No. 1 tuned a little, tucked his instrument tightly under his chin, and they started. Wondrous was the "concord of sweet sounds" they discoursed; every shade of feeling found an exponent in the almost human utterances of the violin; the wail of hopeless regret, the rousing up of the broken spirit, the fire, the mellow harmony of one that had "suffered, yet was strong;" while the under-current of accompaniment filled up the breaks and pauses with an undulating tide of melody. Madeline listened enraptured; never had she enjoyed so rich a treat; for much as she prized the grand church music, to which she was educated in the convent, it wanted the changeful mood which this possessed. Her trepidation vanished; she was no longer a timid girl, trembling before her superiors, but a musician among musicians. In this improved frame of mind Mr. Fitzharris approached, full of importance, with a paper in his hand. He always conducted himself at a musical party as though it were an act of national importance, far too serious for a light word or look.

"We come next, Miss Digby. Now imagine we are in your own sitting-room, with no audience but Miss Foster."

"I cannot, quite," said Madeline, smiling; "but I do not feel nervous."

The duet selected was the ever new "*La ci darem la mano*," and when she came forward, in her soft, crapy-looking white muslin, with the rich colours of the Roman scarfs round her waist and through the masses of her golden hair, on which the bright light shimmered in a dozen different degrees of sunshine and shadow, there was a sort of movement, especially among the men. She knew, in herself, she was original in style. The men murmured their approbation. The musical dowagers said, half enviously, that dear Lady Rawson had always such success in discovering novelties. Meantime, the dusky man at the piano, with a quick upward glance at Madeline, rattled off an unnecessarily brilliant symphony, and putting aside her music, for it was perfectly familiar to her, Madeline began.

The pure fresh voice, rich in its untried sweetness, rolled out clear and free, and as little Fitz had a good deal of dramatic ability, they sang with great animation and expression. Madeline, with a dash of piquant coquetry, was irresistibly attractive.

In short, her appearance was a complete success, of which little Fitz was immensely proud, attributing it all, as he did, to his training, advice, and assistance.

"Bravo, Miss Digby! Bravo, Mr. Fitzharris!" said Lady Rawson, advancing up the open space left between the company and the piano, clapping her hands as she came. "Dramatic, artistic, everything that could be desired. Madeline, I want to speak to you."

Here an officious gentleman with a homœopathic scrap of red ribbon in his button-hole, rushed frantically through the lines, and with a hasty "pardon," took Lady Rawson aside, exclaiming, "Such a misfortune!" leaving Madeline in some curiosity as to her ladyship's communication; but just then she distinguished Lady Templemore at a little distance, in a quiet, sensible cap, fastened on with a couple of diamond pins; and she saw her former mistress was eyeing her through her glass. Presently she came across the room, and addressed Madeline kindly enough, shaking hands with her before the face of the professors, an act which did Madeline good, for Lady Templemore had the reputation of being severely solid, and that nothing common or unclean could by any means be recognized by her.

"Glad to see you, Miss Digby. Agnes and Elizabeth are both in the next room. Agnes was quite wild about coming when she heard you were to sing. Here, Lord Frederic! I wish you would bring Lady Agnes here, she is sitting near the door in the next room."

And they were quickly joined by both Lady Elizabeth and Lady Agnes, between whom and their former preceptress a cordial greeting ensued. Then a dumpy little German, with a seal ring on his thumb, came forward and sang a long composition, with some echoing notes and other tricks in it, which astonished everyone. And then there was a movement to the refreshment rooms. Fitzharris was ordered by Lady Rawson to take down a stout signora, who, when she took his arm, produced the effect of tucking him under her's. So Madeline was left sitting near the piano almost alone, except for the presence of a small, wild-looking, black-eyed man, who, after some furtive glances, addressed her in Italian. She answered but slowly, for the language was not familiar to her, and was about to ask him if he spoke French, when voice and breath were suspended for an instant. The *portières*, already drawn closely back, were further pushed aside, a tall figure entered, and Dudley Ashurst stood before her. She was terribly unprepared; the blood mounted to her brow, and then receding, left her deadly pale. She felt angry that he should present himself before her; sore against him for the suffering he had caused her, the unnecessary trial to which he had

exposed her. And yet how she rejoiced in his beauty—his look of refined strength—his noble bearing! "There is no one like him—none," was the involuntary murmur of her heart; and, "He loved me," the next thought said; while a third voice, a moan from the depths of her soul, spoke sternly, "Between you and him there is a great gulf fixed, so be brave with the courage of despair." Meantime he drew near, his eyes fixed upon her, as she felt, for she kept hers steadily turned on the small Italian. At last, after standing a moment silent, Ashurst bent his lofty head, and said, in a low, tender voice, "Madeline!"

"Lord Hexham," she said, rising and looking up slowly, but full in his face. There was a slight awkward pause; then Lord Hexham, turning with much politeness to the Italian, as if about to include him in the conversation, asked, in Italian, if he spoke English. The little man shook his head, and, after a few words courteously uttered, Lord Hexham turned to Madeline.

"Where are you staying, and what are you doing? Ah, Madeline! How cold—how composed you are! Can you not feel for me?" Madeline smiled—a smile of supreme mockery.

"I am obliged for the interest your inquiries show, my lord; and I am sure you will rejoice when I tell you that I have found a home!"

"Where?—how?" asked the earl, eagerly, jealously.

"I should be obliged to tell too long a story," returned Madeline, turning over the music which lay near her with a tremulous hand, partly from nervousness, partly from a desire to free her eyes from the fascinations of his.

"You cannot speak longer than I like to listen," returned Lord Hexham, in his tenderest tones—then suddenly changing. "I wish that infernal Italian would go away. Do you know the little brute?"

Madeline, amused at the venom oi the question, answered, with a natural bright smile, in the negative.

"By heavens, Madeline, you are more lovely than ever!" said Lord Hexham, with suppressed breath. "You must see me again, and hear me. I have pined for you!—and the sight of that little creature, Fitz, was like a glimpse of heaven to me the other day, because he was associated with you. And then when I drew from him that you were to sing at this detestable house, I went to Lady Templemore, and asked her Irish husband to dine with me, and intrigued to no end to get here. And now, my brightest darling, you must not cast me adrift again."

There was an indefinable change in the man that struck Madeline instantaneously. He was less tenderly deferential. He looked at her with greater boldness than of yore; and the magic effect of his sudden appearance was annihilated. The proud spirit

would have scorned condescension on such terms from the loftiest potentate on earth, while it yearned and almost yielded to the lover at her feet.

"You are very welcome to come and see me and my friend Miss Foster, who was for many years companion to my grandmother. But I am never alone. If you wish my address, Lady Rawson will give it to you. I have no card or pencil."

Lord Hexham was silenced by this reply.

"Madeline," he said, recovering himself, "I have lost you."

"Nay, my lord! I have a home now to work for and to live for!"

The stragglers began to return, and Lord Hexham, his brow a good deal clouded, looked hastily round, said "Good-night then," and pressing Madeline's hand suddenly and tightly, left the room.

The next moment Lady Rawson came up, with an inquiring, anxious expression on her countenance.

"My dear! I have been so worried and kept down-stairs. I wanted so much to speak to you."

"Never mind, now, Lady Rawson," said Madeline, quite understanding her.

"Oh—eh!" returned her ladyship. "Now I will tell you what you must do," she resumed. "Signor Squalicetti is going to sing a buffo duet with little Fitz, and after that, as Madame Mocatta has disappointed, you shall sing us an Irish melody; it will be quite new; and then I will let you go home. It is not more than one now."

"Then I must accompany myself?"

"Yes, to be sure! You can do it very well."

At last it was all over. The Irish melody was immensely successful, and good-natured Lord Templemore himself took Madeline down to her cab.

"Gad! I think you are quite right, Miss Digby," he said, "this is a considerably pleasanter life than rusticating at the Grange, shut up in that deucedly dull school-room."

Madeline drove home in a kind of maze, at once regretting and rejoicing in her separation from Ashurst. "I am an humble item of the population, laboriously earning my bread; but at least no woman, however high—however irreproachable—has a right to shrink from me as a reckless breaker of social law," she thought. "And he, too—he is different in some subtle way; he does not love me as he used. Ah! how grand and noble he looks!—the very type of an English peer. Why is there a great gulf between us, which I cannot, and he *will* not, pass!" Then, checking a few bitter, natural tears, which seemed to scald her eyes, she resolutely set herself to review the points of her position which offered consolation and encouragement. She had never been so happily

placed before. Oh! if that man had not crossed her path, how joyous and hopeful she would be! "But I will not fret—I will not think of him! Why should I let myself suffer more than he does?" And she fought with the splendid vision that would *pose* itself before her mind's eye, and constantly dispelled it, only to see it gradually gather and uprear itself again.

Miss Foster was waiting up, and admitted her. How sweet it was to be welcomed back, with the admiring, motherly fondness the ex-companion always showed to her young ruler!

"I am sure no one looked nicer than yourself, Madeline dear! And how did you sing? Was everyone delighted?"

"I am not sure," returned Madeline, who was busy undressing, and now let down a cloud of golden hair, brushing it diligently as she spoke. Everyone clapped me, and I think—I hope that, professionally, I did very well; but you never saw such dresses, aunty—some so beautiful, and some so funny. Yet I do not think the people—the ladies, I mean—dressed so well, so harmoniously, as those that used to come to the poor countess's *soirées*. Then there was a delightful man that played the violin divinely. You could imagine that his soul lay in his finger-tips, he made the dead strings speak so marvellously. Oh! I should like to go on the stage, and thrill the hearts of masses of people, or melt them to tears!"

"Dear, dear! how can you talk so! I am sure it would be a most dreadful thing to go on the stage—quite unladylike. It would make me miserable!"

"Would it?" said Madeline, thoughtfully, pausing, her white, round arms raised in the act of twisting up her hair. "But I do make you happy! I am a good girl to you."

"Ah, Madeline!" cried Miss Foster, the tears springing to her eyes, "you have been the first to show me happiness—God will bless you!"

"There," returned Madeline, giving her a hearty kiss; "I promise to think well before I make you miserable."

"And what sort of gentleman was it who played so delightfully?"

"Oh! a little fair man—a Spaniard, I believe; very like a consumptive monkey."

"Oh!" said Miss Foster; "and the other gentlemen, what were they like?"

"Just like other men—nothing particular. Lord and Lady Templemore and the girls were there, and quite glad to see me. Lord Templemore took me down to the cab. I like him; I always did. It is very odd, but somehow he alwaye reminds me of my father—my poor dear father. Now, come to bed, aunty, and put out the candle."

"Yes, but you must not think I was alone all the evening. No, indeed. Mr. Elliott came in not five minutes after you had driven away, and sat for an hour I am sure. He would not take any tea; he said he knew it was past my usual time."

"That was very nice for you," observed Madeline. "I know you have given Mr. Elliott a large corner of your heart because he comes from the 'North Countrie.'"

"He is certainly a very nice young man."

"Young! Why, aunty, he is forty, I am sure."

"Well, middle-aged, if you like. But we had a great deal of talk, and I told him all your history and my own, and he seemed to take the greatest interest. Most polite, I am sure: he seemed more at home than the first evening. Then, to be sure, he knew he was talking to a relation, and that makes a difference, does it not, Madeline?"

But Madeline was fast asleep.

"John," said Mrs. Redman, junior, as she and her husband sat at breakfast a few mornings after Lady Rawson's party. "I say, John"—for he was absorbed in the *Times*' City article—"we ought to give a dinner."

"Eh!" he returned, laying down his paper, and re-commencing his breakfast. "A dinner! Yes, to be sure; but why?"

"Well, there are the Blyths; we have dined twice with them since they were last here; and Mrs. Blyth was saying only yesterday that there was nothing so useful in keeping people together, and in good humour with each other, as a little dinner. Now, we ought to ask some of your brother directors and the Blyths, and that Frenchman who has something to do with the ironworks; he is in town, I think. Mrs. Blyth says he is so nice—quite the gentleman. We might manage sixteen."

"Sixteen!" repeated Mr. John, aghast, and remembering the dining-room dimensions—twenty by fourteen. "Why, we should be sitting in each other's laps; and the weather is growing so mild."

"Well, now, John, I hope you won't be interfering and making difficulties. If you have to cook a dinner, as well cook for sixteen as twelve, nay, ten; and, after all, a little squeeze is no great matter. You know *you* have the foot all to yourself."

"Yes, yes; but one does not like to see people taking it by turns to get at their plates."

"Nonsense! Let us see who we can have. There's Mr. and Mrs. Blyth; that is two: and Mr. and Mrs. Prothero, they asked us about a month ago. Don't you remember? We could not go?"

"No, I don't," said Mr. John.

"And then you might get old Shuttlecock, or Featherwig. I would rather have Featherwig; he is quite a man of the world, and so aristocratic. But that old general does eat and sleep so; he is just live lumber."

"Humph!" groaned Mr. John.

"Then the Frenchman," resumed the wife, "would be quite a variety. I'll engage the Protheros never were at so distinguished a party before."

"He is a —— nuisance!" growled Mr. John; "for though he can speak English, it's precious little he understands: he's a sharp fellow, though. I tell you what, Jemima, I wish you would ask Susan and her husband."

"Mr. and Mrs. Comerford! No, indeed! What is the use of swamping the table with one's relations? Mrs. C. is so heavy in hand; never can talk of anything but her children and servants."

Mr. Redman made no reply.

"Let me see," continued his wife, "that Mr. O'Keefe is far and away the most agreeable man I ever met: he speaks French, too. There is such a dash about him. You know he is descended from the kings of Kerry?"

"I don't think his name is worth much in the City, though," grumbled Mr. John.

"The City is not the world," said the lady, tartly; "he says he ought to be called 'The O'Keefe,' as if there was no other."

"Just as well there wasn't," growled Mr. John confidentially to his egg.

"That makes us nine," resumed his wife, disregarding his narrow-minded observations. "Now, I think it would be an excellent opportunity to ask Mr. and Mrs. Macallan and their daughter; they are very elegant people. And, I tell you what, John, if you *will* have your own relations, ask Madeline Digby."

"What! to *dinner?*" asked Mr. John, a good deal surprised. "Madeline Digby!"

"Yes. She really does look uncommon nice; and sings and speaks French, and is of some use. No one need know she goes out teaching. Mark my words, that girl will get on. I went to see her and poor Foster the other day, and Madeline had been to a grand party at Lady Rawson's, where there was half the nobility in London. Then there will be room for one more."

"Well, I have no objection," said Mr. John. "I should be glad to see little Madeline again; though she did act like a fool refusing such a good marriage."

"Did she?—how?" asked his wife, eagerly.

Mr. John gave a short abstract of the Moorcroft refusal case; and Mrs. Redman exclaimed, "Law! well, I did think she had a little more common sense. Now then, I will go and write the

invitations. Nothing less than a fortnight's notice is good style."

"Well, as you have a place to spare, I wish you would write an invitation for Mr. Arthur Downing."

"Who is he?" asked Mrs. John, suspiciously.

"Oh! he is our engineer; a very rising man indeed—Neilson's right hand."

"Well, I don't mind. I suppose he is well known to the directors."

Madeline and Miss Foster had settled to their evening occupations, the former a little tired, after a busy day which yet had kept rebellious thoughts from disturbing her, she was pale and slightly languid, and the dark shade of fatigue under her eyes made her look softer, if less brilliant; it was a little more than a week since Lady Rawson's party, and though both partners had already learned to look on Mr. Elliott as an established, almost an intimate acquaintance, they did not expect to see him so soon again.

It was therefore a surprise, and not an unpleasant one, when "Hemma" announced—

"The gentleman'm," and Hugh Elliott walked in. He was slightly embarrassed, and at a loss to account for himself.

"Got away rather early from the office," he said, shaking hands with Miss Foster, and making a sort of a bow, scarce more than a nod to Madeline, "and thought I would look in and ask you how you did on my way home," he did *not* say, however, that he had taken an early chop in the City in order to secure a long uninterrupted visit.

"I am sure we are very glad to see you," said Miss Foster, quite brightened up, "and you must have some tea this time, we have not begun yet."

Madeline smiled, and said with the gracious condescension of a princess, "I was unfortunate enough not to be at home when you called last, Mr. Elliott."

"Yes, you had gone to some grand party."

"Where I half expected to meet *you*," said Madeline, partly in jest.

"I never go to parties," said Hugh Elliott, gloomily.

"What a pity," returned Madeline, rising to assist Miss Foster in getting the tea, while Elliott sat dreamily watching them, and unconsciously enjoying the sweet homeliness of seeing the two gentlewomen get out the tea things, and set the tray, and look that the kettle boiled, with embarrassment or apology; and then a cake was produced with much pride by Miss Foster, who proceeded to cut quite a pile of delicious brown bread and

butter; there was a nameless influence in it, which set him thinking, a gracious charm springing from some source he could not fathom.

"Now, Mr. Elliott," said Madeline, rousing him from his reverie, "please hand aunty the kettle, the division of labour demands that you should not sit idle."

"Certainly not," exclaimed Elliott, feeling guilty of the most terrible defalcation of good manners, and rushing at the kettle, would have plunged his hand into the steam, but Madeline cried to him.

"Stop, stop, we do not wish you to be wounded in our cause! Here is the kettle-holder," and she presented a tasteful contrivance of scarlet cloth and white beads. Elliott looked at it admiringly after performing his task.

"This is too nice for the work."

"Oh no! It took a very short time to make, and we may as well have what prettiness we can. But what do you do in the evening if you do not go out?"

"Oh! I dine out sometimes, but I am not much more than two years settled in London, and have not many acquaintances."

"Do you never go out to dancing parties? or musical parties?"

"Never, it is just so much waste of time; I do not know how to dance, and I do not care for music!"

"That is terrible," said Madeline, with grave compassion. "Then how do you live?"

"I go away early to my office," returned Elliott, answering in the same spirit of simple candour with which she questioned, "and work away all day, get home about seven, dine, have a smoke, read a bit, and go to bed. Latterly, I have dined occasionally with some men in the same trade as myself."

"You must make a great deal of money," observed Madeline meditatively, whereupon Miss Foster ejaculated—

"My dear Madeline," in a tone of remonstrance, while Elliott looked at her with a sharp glance.

"I beg your pardon," said Madeline, colouring and laughing. "I do not mean to inquire into the amount of your capital. I only meant to say that it would take a great deal of money to pay for a life so divested of amusement and variety. Do you not feel sometimes a longing to hear exquisite music, and move in time to it, to see beautiful scenes, to ramble away over hill and dale, or to have a number of charming people about you to exchange bright thoughts with, and double them by barter?"

"No!" returned Elliott, rousing up at her voice, so rich so full of her own craving for pleasure, "but I do sometimes think of former times, the bleak bracing moors of the north, and the wild sort of pleasure of a stormy night at sea, when you have

pitted your skill and forethought and nerve against the force of the gale, and know that though you would have a tussle for it, you will pull through; stock farming too is exciting, riding at headlong speed after the cattle, hunting up strays, the loneliness and freedom!"

"Have you experienced all this?" asked Madeline, looking at him with greater interest than she had yet felt. "What a punishment London life must be to you! I wonder you can endure it!"

"I can, because it is the only life that will further my purpose, Miss Digby," he returned with some dignity, as though he thought she undervalued him. "I wish to make a name, which means a fortune."

"Well, you have my best wishes. But oh! do try and mix a little amusement with your money-making, before you become a millionaire, yet poverty-stricken, because unable to enjoy!"

"Mr. Elliott will think you a sad wild girl," put in Miss Foster, apologetically, "you do not know what a hard worker she is, never weary. I declare," interrupting herself, as the servant laid a letter, as if for the general benefit, upon the table, "that's Mrs. John Redman's writing, it is for you, Madeline."

"An invitation to dinner I protest," cried Madeline in great surprise, as she glanced at it. "I must, in some mysterious way, have risen in public estimation. Here is a regular formal 'requests the honour of Miss Digby's company at dinner, on Thursday the 26th instant, at seven o'clock.'"

"Gracious me! How extraordinary!" cried Miss Foster, in great astonishment.

"Immense sensation on receipt of an invitation from an aunt and uncle," said Madeline, suddenly struck with the absurdity of the case, and sparkling all over with a bright laugh. "A high testimony to the value of money, eh, Mr. Elliott?"

"I hardly understand," replied the gentleman. "But is Mr. Redman of Corbet Court your uncle?"

"He is."

"One of the directors in the Intertionanal Iron Shipbuilding Company?"

"The same."

"The only sound man they have got among them," he returned; "except, perhaps, Neilson."

"Well, I trust uncle Redman will not lose his money, for he was always friendly to me."

"Oh, it may succeed; less promising concerns have turned out very well"—and a pause ensued.

Hugh Elliott wanted to ask Madeline to sing, and yet held back, he had an idea that she under-rated him. He felt he was

deficient in the exterior polish and attraction so prominent in her. Moreover, she did not show that deference to his money and new-made position which he was beginning to expect. He had been wonderfully and rapidly successful, and as his charac ter stood high with all those to whom he was known, he commanded an unusual amount of respect and consideration. The commercial community of the City is narrower than outsiders know; at least, a man's character, achievements, and capacity, is quickly known amongst his brothers of the ledger. And it is amazing, the value placed upon a bold, quick-sighted, successful fellow; who, withal, has the reputation of being a man of his word. The effect of this is always more or less intoxicating in proportion to the strength of the nature on which it is brought to bear. With Hugh Elliott it was scarce perceptible, and he would have indignantly denied that the flattering notice of men older and richer than himself, produced on him any effect at all. He was therefore conscious of a semi-sore feeling towards Madeline, even while her every look, tone, and gesture, possessed for him a subtle charm. Of the finer tactics of that world-old game, "love," he knew absolutely nothing. Sentiment, as yet, had for him no existence, and from things sensual he had been preserved by a certain innate wholesome strength, the essence of which is cleanliness.

Now Miss Foster who, in her own lady-like way, bowed down and worshipped him (quite as much because he was a real live relative and a hero, as because he was a rich City man), his riches, no doubt, indefinitely multiplied in her simple arithmetic. She was a model woman in his estimation, so gentle and respectful! But as for her audacious partner, with the small rounded form, and rich, rippling, golden hair, and large dark eyes, that melted and fired as she spoke; with her striking contrast of spirit, force, and physical slightness, if he could at all impress that daring sprite with a sense of his importance, of the weight of his opinions, he felt there was nothing he could not do for her—nothing that he would not dare! Even in this, their third interview, he longed to clasp the little soft white hand, contrasting so strongly with his, so brown and hard; to pour a thousand kisses on it, and breaking through the outward adamantine shell of seeming, cry to her,—"I may be rugged, unpleasant to the eye, but I am resolute and forceful, trust me, submit yourself to me, and then come, rest under the shadow of my strength—my care—for *I can* guard you."

And Madeline, little dreaming of this dumb inner crying of nature's truth, looking on him as an awkward, worthy, respectable man, said, with a kindly wish to amuse him, "Shall I sing, Mr. Elliott? I know no Border ballads, but I have a few Scotch ones."

"Yes, do," said Elliott, eagerly; then remembering himself, "I shall be greatly obliged," he added.

Then Madeline went to the piano, and sang "Bonnie Mary Hay," and that hackneyed, yet inexhaustible "Auld Lang Syne,' till Elliott's Northumbrian heart melted within him; he said very little, however, and the songstress fancied she had exerted herself in vain. The conversation flagging, Elliott rose soon after to take leave.

"I am sure it is exceedingly kind of you to come and see us in this way," said Miss Foster. But I hope (whenever you have nothing better to do), you will continue to call."

"Certainly; I intend it," returned Hugh, with an air of determination.

"We are always glad to see you," added Madeline, *en princesse.*

And so he took his leave, and scarce was he out of ear-shot when Miss Foster exclaimed, "Well, Madeline! I do not know what you think, but really Mr. Elliott appears to me a very gentleman-like, fine-looking man; something so kind and sincere about him."

"Yes, aunty; I daresay he is a true, loyal man; indeed, I feel sure there is a gentleman-like foundation somewhere, but it is so overlaid with—what shall I say—*detritus*, carried down by the stream of circumstances—even though the stones be nuggets and the sand gold—that it is hard to find. Yet he is a man I would trust, though I would much rather not be obliged to ask a favour of him."

"If you did I am certain he would not refuse, for if not already in love with you, he is fast losing his heart."

"Aunty! for the love of heaven do not talk of love or lovers! That man despises me as a self-opinionated idiot—I know he does—though on some subjects I can think more justly than himself, I am quite sure. How is it, aunty, dear, that you, who have counted more years than me, you who have always lived under the rule of common sense and common views, should have these romantic ideas? Why is it that you do not feel and see as I do, that whatever dower of grace or beauty, or genius, or tenderness, or truth, or purity, nature has bestowed upon a woman, it is absolutely nothing, if Mammon has not endorsed the cheque, and backed it with 'certain moneys.' No, no! I never expect to be loved for my better self! There may be men found who would ask nothing from a woman but that she should, with her heart's love, her grace of mind and form, fill up and complete his existence, but I have never met one, and never hope to do so. I only ask to be an independent, self-helpful, old maid—secure from parish aid, and ever thankful to God for sending me so kind, so indispensable a friend as yourself!" Here followed a slight display of waterworks, and a hearty hug.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THURSDAY, the 26th instant, was a day of infinite importance and exertion at Warwick Crescent. At an early hour a steady flow of parcels and trays of confectioner's wares set in. The cook, deposed *ad interim*, looked on with a critical and disparaging eye at the *entrées*, *entremets*, *soufflets*, the copper moulds of creams, and jellies, and ices, which divers and sundry the *employés* of Messrs. Savoury, Sauce & Co., continually brought in and cumbered the kitchen table withal, disregarding the remonstrances of the rightful head, and treating her as if she was "no more than a kitchen-maid," a fact indisputable, as on this trying occasion the boiling of the vegetables was alone entrusted to her. Above stairs "missis" herself assisted in the uncovering of the drawing-room furniture, and laying out the books more symmetrically than any other hand could accomplish, and then threw herself heart and soul into the intricacies of the dessert, in a little back parlour, called by courtesy the "library."

Quickly the hours flew by, till it was time to perform an elaborate toilette, during which Mr. John returned, and was greeted on the threshold with, "Please sir, missis says will you see to the wine at once."

Mrs. John's programme was faithfully carried out, with one exception—the elegant Macallans were engaged, and the inelegant Comerfords were asked in their place.

Madeline, wishing to avoid the awkwardness of entering alone when the room was full, arrived first. She knew by instinct that a *demi-toilette* would be simply considered dowdy, or "poverty-stricken" by her aunt and her "set," so she arrayed herself in her best silvery grey silk and black lace, which, if somewhat old in style for so young a woman, was exquisitely becoming.

Mrs. John was superb in black velvet, a good deal of gold and scarlet showered on her head and trimmings, for even velvet could not escape her rage for "garniture," without mentioning the fan, and bouquet, and scent-bottle, with which she was encumbered. "Well, Madeline, you are first in the field,'' exclaimed her hostess, radiant with the sense of fine dress and coming triumph. "I shall give you the Frenchman to take you in to dinner! I declare you look very nice, though your dress is rather in the style of my grandmother. But gracious goodness child! what splendid lace! I am afraid you are an extravagant puss."

"No, indeed, Mrs. Redman! This belonged to my poor aunt de Fontarce."

"Oh, ah, yes!—the Frenchwoman," returned Mrs. John. "Well, it is a perfect treasure. What do you think!—was it not provok-

ing of your uncle?—you know I was disappointed of the Macallans—*such* nice people! He is in the East India trade—beer and things—a most elegant man. Well, they disappointed, and your uncle was all along wanting to ask those stupid Comerfords. So he met Mr. C. in the City, and asked him, his wife, and daughter, in their place, and *then* came home and told me! I do not think he will ever do such a thing again!" concluded Mrs. Redman, with a short, sharp, and decisive nod of the head, painfully suggestive as to the amount of punishment endured by the rebel. "Now mind," she resumed, "you talk and laugh, and make yourself as pleasant as you can, and cut out that prim stuck-up daughter of Mrs. Comerford's—she looks down upon every one, and is just your grandmother all over."

Madeline laughed, and was saved the trouble of a reply by the announcement of "Mr. and Mrs. Blyth, and the Honourable Captain Featherwig."

Mrs. John received them with great cordiality, though in truth a little chafed by their coming together, as it gave Mrs. Blyth the effect of having an honourable as a follower, and, albeit chums, neither lady would have yielded an inch of social standing to the other. The Honourable Featherwig was a wonderful specimen of restoration and preservation. His coat hung loosely upon him, but was from the hand of a first-rate artist. His thin, shaky legs, terminated in boots of exquisite cut and polish. By gaslight the purple tone could not be perceived stealing through the splendid black of his whiskers and moustaches, and an eyeglass of youthful simplicity hid the wateriness of at least one eye, where the sparkle had long since died out. The only acknowledgment of antiquity about him was a crush hat, held with the ease of old custom under his left arm. Nevertheless, Mrs. John bestowed much attention upon him. He brought with him an aroma of the clubs, a flavour of the opera, with a dash of the upper ten thousand in it—irresistible to her aristocratic tendencies. She felt a little piqued it is true, at the easy familiarity with which he was treated by Mrs. Blyth, not knowing, as that lady did, that the directorial sprig of nobility was always quite ready to save an eighteen-penny fare by accepting a seat in her snug brougham.

The Hon. Captain bowed and smiled, and said: "Gad! it was very obliging of Mrs. Redman to ask him to her house—and deuced pretty house it was; had no idea such nice places grew so far out of town." Then he re-screwed his glass into his eye and fixed it on Madeline, who felt dreadfully inclined to laugh.

"I must apologise for Mr. Redman," said the charming hostess in her most sprightly manner. "He was detained rather late in the City."

"Man of great energy," said Captain Featherwig with languid

admiration. "Enormous energy, 'pon my soul! Won't you sit down, Mrs.—ahem—Mrs. Redman?" He was getting very tired himself. And then Mr. John entered, and the greetings were renewed. Mrs. Blyth, who was a small, keen, black-eyed woman, and who evidently went in for the cool, quiet style of "fastness," as contra-distinguished from her friend's jovial rapidity, devoted her attention to Mr. John; and Mr. Blyth stood silent upon the hearth-rug, looking very earnestly at Madeline, who had placed herself in a quiet corner between the piano and a window. She had a vague sense of having seen him before. He was a tall, well-dressed, gentleman-like looking man, with a pale face, projecting brow, and a *very* thin-lipped mouth—opening wide to receive things, and shutting tight, almost hermetically, to retain them.

He looked so long and so firmly that she began to feel a little uncomfortable, when the entrance of other guests, Mr. and Mrs. Prothero and the Comerfords—Miss C., the picture of refined simplicity, in white and pink, with a wreath of blush roses accurately fixed on her head, and a good deal of complication in the arrangement of her hair. She was very colourless, and thin, and proper. Seven o'clock was now a few minutes past, and Mr. John, in anticipation, was desperately struggling to decipher a mysterious paper given him by his wife, and certain he should make a mess of it. Mrs. Comerford had discovered Madeline, and saluted her with the candid exclamation: "I had not the least idea that you were to be here. And how are you?"

Madeline replied suitably, and inquired for Mrs. Redman.

"Oh, she is pretty well," returned Mrs. Comerford with a sigh. "Indeed, she was asking about you the other day. Poor dear! she has always an idea that you will be coming to her for money. I think if you were to call, and say you were getting on pretty well, it would be a relief to her mind. How do you think Susan Jane is looking? Wonderful! for I assure you she scarcely eats meat in Lent. And it *is* so bad for the skin."

"Mrs. Blyth—Mr. Comerford," said Mr. John, in a sudden and *staccato* way, as if bolting down his difficulties, and was pierced immediately by a glance of anger and contempt from his wife.

Fortunately for him, at this critical moment the door opened, and the effective "green-grocer," evidently impressed as by something unusual, bawled out, "The O'Keefe!" immediately retreating behind the door. Whereupon enter a big, stout man, with vast shoulders, and a profusion of red hair. His large, red, jovial face, with light grey eyes, and wide mouth, full-lipped and slightly depressed at the corners, but furnished with a superb row of large white teeth, beamed out of a frill of dark-red whiskers meeting below his chin.

This description but faintly conveys an idea of the great O'Keefe. Largeness was his leading characteristic. He was well set up; always holding himself back, so as to throw out his chest, and a very visible protuberance below it. Then he strode, rather than walked, with a semi-circular motion, and took up twice the room he required. He also had a habit of running his fingers through his profuse hair, and, besides doubling the apparent size of his head, imparting to it the effect of that curious process known as having been dragged through a bush backwards. He had a big, sonorous, but not unpleasant voice, and his brogue, though somewhat subdued by sojourning in many lands, was, nevertheless, perceptible as a sort of constant under-current of tone.

Beneath the shadow of this magnificent person, who brought a kind glow and movement along with him, two much smaller individuals entered, both of whom Madeline recognized, to her infinite surprise. The first was Mr. Arthur Downing—as neat and spruce as ever—looking as if newly "set" by some patent particular process for putting a sharp edge on humanity. The other was a thick-set muscular Frenchman, with a head like a globular scrubbing-brush, very black, with quick flashing, hungry eyes, big blue jaws, waxed moustache, and a short, thick chin tuft. Madeline had seen him but once before, and that nearly two years ago, in his mother's box at the theatre in Paris. Momentary as that glance had been, it—with the events that followed—sufficed to picture him in her recollection for ever.

What a wide page of memory unrolled itself before her as her eyes fell upon him. Her pleasant, smooth, *intriguante* of an aunt—the wild, bright hopes, with which she started on that lonely journey to Paris—the tranquillity of the convent, of which she wearied too soon; the great change of thought and belief that came upon her there—the mingled terror and excitement of her aunt's proposition that she should marry Monsieur Delille; and the bitter lesson she then and after learnt, that undowered, scarce any man would care to have her as a wife, which conviction nearly drove her into Dudley Ashurst's arms. All this swept over her brain, a mist of thought. Meantime the great O'Keefe had shouldered his way to the lady of the house.

"Mrs. Redman; your most obedient! You're as blooming as a rose tree in full bearing. Let me present my two excellent friends, Mr. Downing, our future Brunel, and Monsieur Delille, a most distinguished member of the French army, who, to the infinite disappointment of his imperial master, has left his service for ours, the I. C. S. Company. Eh, *mon cher!* and a capital exchange he has made of it. Ah! Featherwig, me boy! you look as hearty as a buck, though maybe you couldn't le'p so high;" and he nearly crushed that fragile specimen of preservation by a

terrific shake of the hand. Then Mr. Redman was cordially greeted, but both Mr. and Mrs. Blyth were more guarded in their salutations, which little affected the boisterous joyousness of the great O'Keefe.

"Will you sit near the fire, Mr. O'Keefe?" said Mrs. Redman.

"No, I am obliged to you; I'll just take advantage of the vacant place by your charming young friend here. Faith it's a shame to leave your fair side all *unguyarded*, lady," he continued to the severely refined, high-church Miss Comerford, who absolutely shrank from him in horror.

"Just as you like," returned Mrs. Redman, with a jolly laugh, for the great "O'" was an immense favourite of hers. "And, moreover, you shall take the young lady down to dinner."

"By Jove, I am in luck to-day!" exclaimed O'Keefe, rubbing his hands with such rampant self-gratulation, that poor Miss Comerford was covered with blushes, and everyone else laughed.

Dinner was now announced, and a hasty pairing-off ensued.

"Here, Mr Delille," said Mrs. Redman, who was rather afraid of him, "will you take down Miss Digby?"

The Frenchman set his heels together, and dropping his arms, made a bow—indicating the pliancy of his backbone; raising himself and his eyes, they encountered Madeline's, whose lips were parted with a slight smile, for she was almost glad to see him. He started, and a sudden flash of delight and astonishment blazed out in his eyes. "*Mais, mon Dieu!*" he muttered; then checking himself, and assuming an aspect of profound gravity and respect, he rounded his right elbow, and with a murmured "*permettez*," ceremoniously presented it.

"Come, Captain Featherwig," said Mrs. John, "we will lead the way." And they filed off: the hostess first, the host, with Mrs. Prothero last.

After the usual struggles the company were seated, and Madeline found herself next Mr. Downing, and opposite the O'Keefe. At first M. Delille contented himself with the most profound attention to the arrangement of Madeline's dress, but hardly spoke, while Mrs. Redman—talking gaily all the while to the Hon. Captain, who started by helping himself to a glass of sherry—distributed the soup. (At the period of which we treat, "the dinner *à la Russe*" had not permeated to the strata of Warwick Crescent.)

"So, Miss Digby," exclaimed Mr. Downing, perceiving her for the first time, "I did not know I was to have the pleasure of meeting you to-day."

"Nor I," returned Madeline, giving him her hand; for she was glad to see him on his wife's account. "But I am very pleased. How is dear Jessie? She has not written to me for such an age! and I am longing to see the baby."

"Jessie's all right again. But I did not suppose so philosophic a lady as yourself would care about babies."

"Didn't you!" said Madeline, good-humouredly.

"Jessie came to town yesterday," said Mr. Downing. "She is at her mother's; but we have taken a house in this neighbourhood."

"Indeed! I am very glad. Then you have left Stapleford?"

"Yes. I have joined this new concern. Your uncle is a director in it."

"I believe I knew some of mademoiselle's (mademoiselle or madame?)," began M. Delille, with a look of eager curiosity.

"Mademoiselle," replied Madeline, turning to him with a smile.

He bowed and brightened.

"I believe that I knew some of mademoiselle's relations in Paris."

He threw this out as a feeler, not knowing how far the matrimonial negotiations of his mother and Madame de Fontarce had been made known to the *belle ange*, whom cruel destiny had torn from him.

"I believe you did," returned Madeline, much amused at the situation.

"Ah! then figure to yourself the pleasure it will be to my good mother to hear your news!"

"Sherry or hock?" said a waiter.

"*Merci*," said the temperate Frenchman; whereupon the waiter, thinking the choice left to himself, filled his glass with fiery sherry.

"Monsieur is very good," returned Madeline, pleased to speak French once more.

"And small thanks to him," shouted O'Keefe from the other side of the table, where the monosyllabic answers of Miss Comerford had terribly damped his efforts to be agreeable—"Small thanks to him, and he sittin' where he is. Ah, ah! *mon beau!* you're in as great luck as myself," he continued, in French, which he spoke well, and with a droll look, which contradicted his words. In fact the great "O'" began to wish heartily he had pitched upon Madeline instead of his present companion.

She gave him a bright smile, and then Captain Featherwig asked him if he thought Madame Mocatta, the new soprano, and Lightly, of the Royal Opera, were likely to come to terms.

"Small chance at present," cried O'Keefe. "I was speakin' to Lightly myself only yesterday morning, and he bagged and implored me to go to madame, and bring her to reason. Why, says I, do you want me to sell myself to the devil? for you've just given me one of his tasks—like makin' a rope out of sand, or emptying the ocean into a dust-hole. No, no! says I, I had a trial of her at Cigaretta la Mar." This was the capital of the states of

Fireandtow, S.A., where the O'Keefe had been a mysteriously political personage.

"What is it?" (this to a waiter who presented a dish.) "Stewed pigeons! No! they are all bones and gravy. What's that coming round? Cutlets! I'll wait, thank you."

"Ah, *mon cher!* you know how to live in France. Your splendid talent for organization is seldom more usefully shown than in the little *carte!* It saves one from a miserable misapplication of storage room. But"—returning to English, and addressing the Hon. Captain—"though she was no great shakes then, I never had such a mission! Ah! she is a woman of spirit. The President says to me: 'O'Keefe,' says he—— "

Here the Captain broke in: "No chance of an accommodation yet, then? I tell you what, there's an uncommon nice girl sings at the Canterbury. If old Lightly would take her up, Gad! *she* would take the town. She's a soprano."

"Cuppleston, you know, is one of the boldest fellows at the bar," said Mr. Blyth, his loud and rather dictatorial tones drowning those of Featherwig. "He was stating a case before old Parleby, one of the most dignified of our judges. It was some matter in dispute about a brougham and an omnibus. In the course of his speech Cuppleston was mentioning the brougham. 'Broom, Mr. Cuppleston,' says his lordship; 'that is the present received pronunciation.' 'Very well, my lud,' replied Cuppleston, 'I stand corrected.' A few minutes after Parleby mentioned the omnibus. Up jumped Cuppleston. 'Beg pardon, my lud; 'bus—'bus is the generally received pronunciation at present.' You may fancy the titter that ran through the court. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Dear me," replied Mrs. Comerford, the immediate recipient of this anecdote. "I wonder he was not afraid to speak so."

"*Eh, bien!* mademoiselle. You find this great city *triste* after our beautiful Paris?"

"Yes; yet I like the freedom of London. In Paris I never had the smallest liberty."

"Ah! we know too well the value of our charming young ladies to trust them out of our sight!"

"A bad compliment after all," said Madeline, laughing, and then half shrinking from the eager look of admiration that gleamed from the Frenchman's eyes.

"Hock or champagne?"

"Hock," returned Madeline.

"By Jove!" cried O'Keefe, "you are the first lady ever I heard refuse champagne! Eh, Blyth! though you don't know as much about them as I do, I am thinking."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Blyth, drily. "Nevertheless I admire Miss Digby's taste."

Madeline felt a little surprised at his knowing her name.

"Digby," repeated the O'Keefe; "sure, I know that name? May I be so bold as to ask if Wexford's your county? or the county Kilkinny? There's Digbys in both, and there isn't a hoigher or older family in the country. There was Everard Digby, of Killycoolan; his mother and my grandmother were first cousins. Ah! it was he had the horses and hounds. He and mee fawther they went by the name of the Cocks of Killycoolan! There was no end to the divilment they were up to. And the fortunes they got through! The O'Keefes, of course, were the rale old Milesian stock; but the Digbys were not far behind them. Well, 'God be with long ago!' Here's your health, Miss Digby. I'm pretty sure you're the granddaughter or great-granddaughter of old Everard Digby. Faith! you've an improved edition of the Digby nose!"

"Thank you," said Madeline, laughing and colouring, as almost all eyes were attracted to her by this speech. "I have never been in Ireland, and I know nothing of my relations; but am very happy to claim you as a countryman."

"Ah! there's a touch of native music in your voice for all that," cried the delighted O'Keefe. "I find mademoiselle is one of my near kindred," he continued in French to M. Delille. "Never knew it till this minit!"

M. Delille was "aware of the fact that mademoiselle's was a most distinguished family."

Mrs. Blyth, who had a great contempt for The O'Keefe, now put in: "But all Irish families are very distinguished, are they not, Mr. O'Keefe?"

"Yes, they are," he returned, taking up the gauntlet boldly. "But there are degrees of distinction anyhow. We are distinguished for better things than mere filthy lucre."

"And *ex*-tinguished sometimes for want of it," remarked Mr. Downing, who had hitherto been eating diligently and in silence.

"That was nate, sir," returned O'Keefe, with grave approbation. "Faith, very nate. I'll take another glass of champagne after that, and so will this young lady. She has been looking at me imploringly this half hour."

The indignant scorn depicted on Miss Comerford's face is beyond my feeble pen to describe. Mrs. John laughed good humouredly, and said "Champagne to Mr. O'Keefe," who, with a sort of confidential semi-wink to Madeline, quaffed a bumper with great satisfaction. She was infinitely amused by him; and though she had never before encountered an Irishman except Lord Templemore, she seemed instinctively to understand and appreciate him.

All this time Mr. Blyth had remained silent, but deeply attentive, his brows slightly knit, and his eyes fixed on Madeline.

M. Delille now devoted himself to do the amiable, and discoursed of the drama and Lamartine's poetry, and sundry topics allowable, as far as his ideas went, for a demoiselle, all the time looking almost fiercely at her. She liked him, and yet shrunk from him. It was so pleasant to speak French again—to converse with a man so well-bred after the foreign fashion. He told her that he had accepted the position of engineer to the International and Colonial Ship-building Company, and would be often in London; that his mother was charmed, as she had so great an esteem for that British nation with whom France now entertained so warm a sympathy, &c., &c. This company was the great feature of the age; they intended to annihilate the "impossible." "As for himself, he had a little plan to run an iron road, on an entirely new principle, across the great Sahara, and open commercial communications between Algeria and Timbuctoo."

"But," said Madeline, "I thought it was only a ship-building company?"

"But why limit the application of iron?"

It was his idea and that of his excellent friend O'Keefe, that railways ought to be included in the objects of the company, &c., &c.

This conversation carried them through the course of ducklings, sweets, and cheese. Dessert was on the table, when the hum of general conversation was broken by loud vociferations addressed by the great O'Keefe to Mr. Prothero, who had mildly uttered disparagements of the I. C. S. Company, after the fashion of City men, who, in common with their fellow-creatures, love to contemn the projects of their neighbours.

"Shaky! my good sir; it's adamantine in its firmness—adamantine, faith! The finest investment going *if*"—and he paused portentously—"narrow-minded and over-cautious individuals don't spoil it by too limited a field of action."

"Thank you, O'Keefe," returned Mr. John, laughing. "I know who you mean."

"You are a good fellow, Redman. No better. But to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, you are wanting in that boldness of action which—Well! pass up the port! There's no use in talking. What's bred in the bone—eh, Miss Comerford? I know you're of my way of thinking. But as I was saying, there's no finer investment going. Sure, it was only yesterday, Palmerston said to me—(I got very intimate with him the time I had to settle that little affair, when the Fireandtowans robbed and murdered an English bark and her crew that went ashore near Cigaretta la Mar)—I met him at the corner of Piccadilly—says he, 'That's a capital thing I see your name down in,' says he. 'They knew what they were about when they put you in

the direction. I wouldn't mind having a few shares myself,' says he, 'if it was not *infra dig.*' 'Don't mind that, mee lord,' says I; 'twenty per cent.'s a good salve.' 'Don't you tempt your elders,' he says, laughing, and with that he hailed a cab. 'I'm afraid I'll be late at the House,' says he."

"What a pity you did not ask your distinguished friend to accompany you here this evening?" sneered Mrs. Blyth. "I'm sure Mrs. Redman would have been happy to see him."

"So I did," returned O'Keefe, gravely. "For I know our *charming* hostess is the soul of hospitality! But he said he knew the party, and he had enough fencing and cross-examination in the House, and didn't want a second edition in society."

After which counter-thrust the great O'Keefe favoured Madeline with another semi-wink, indicating the sympathy between them; and then Mrs. Redman, to prevent further sparring, gave the mysterious signal for the ladies' departure.

The usual somnolent interval ensued. Mrs. Redman had a short, whispered conference on the hearth-rug with Mrs. Blyth, which ended in somewhat suppressed laughter, and then the latter betook herself to solitary reflection in a low, deep chair, and Mrs. Redman to do the attentive hostess to Mrs. Prothero and her sister-in-law, scraps of whose conversation occasionally met Madeline's ear:—"Twelve pounds a year, with everything found. Pink roses in her bonnet, and a parasol on Sunday. Just pop him into a warm bath, and rub the spine with a piece of house-flannel."

These disjointed morsels of wisdom and experience, however, failing to interest her, Madeline drew near her cousin, and endeavoured to keep up a conversation—a more difficult undertaking than she anticipated. At last Miss Comerford vouchsafed to inquire if Madeline had been at a convent school, and on receiving an affirmative reply, further unlocked her lips to ask if the altar cloths in Paris were more used with single emblems, or embroidered all over. Madeline, a little amused, answered to the best of her ability, and a little languid talk ensued. The first tray of tea, however, had hardly gone round when Monsieur Delille made his appearance, somewhat to the surprise of the ladies. The hostess, however, confronted him—fan waving, bracelets jingling, with "nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles." The Frenchman bowed low, and was most deferential; but Mrs. Redman found the difficulties of language too great to permit of her exercising her usual amount of fascination. M. Delille, therefore, was soon set at liberty, and stood for a while a little uncertain what to do, scarcely daring to join *les demoiselles*, until Madeline, pitying his forlorn position, looked at him with a smile, and he was instantly at her side, with an air of rapture which lit up, but did not soften, his harsh features.

"This young lady," said Madeline, courteously attempting to bring Miss Comerford into the conversation, "is anxious to know the prevailing taste in church ornaments in France. Perhaps you can inform her?"

"*Eh! ma fois!*" returned the Frenchman, laughing and shrugging his shoulders, "I am soldier; not priest. I cannot. I deeply regret it, but I can give no information. Mademoiselle is devout."

Miss Comerford made no reply, except to bridle up: not that she was altogether indisposed towards the only available bachelor of the party, but it was more than her cold shyness would permit, to reply in downright French.

Mrs. Comerford observed the scene, and arose from the sofa, where Mrs. John had appointod her. "Why, Susan Jane, don't you answer the gentleman? I'm sure you ought to be able. I thought you never spoke anything but French at school."

"M. Delille speaks English. Do you not, monsieur?" asked Madeline, thinking to please all parties.

"But—yes, certainly," returned the Frenchman.

"Thank you," said Mrs. Comerford, with cold dignity. "I imagine my daughter *can* make herself understood though she has *not* had the advantage of being brought up by a French countess."

Here the elegant Featherwig slipped into the room. "Obliged to steal off; Mr. Redman so doosedly hospitable; expected to be floored, be gad! Very sorry, Mrs. Redman, must run away early: promised my sister, Lady Malden, to look in at her little reception this evening. Who's the girl in grey, Mrs. Redman? Uncommon well got up. A look of Templemore's youngest daughter (the best-looking of them, not out yet) about her, eh?"

With much humiliation of spirit, Mrs. Redman confessed she did not know Lord Templemore's daughters; but added, "I think my niece does." Under these circumstances Madeline was *her* niece. "So sorry you are going, Captain Featherwig."

"Going!" shouted The O'Keefe, who now entered with the rest of the gentlemen. "You're a pretty kind of a sailor to run away from the ladies as well as the bottle."

"Run! No, no! Not run, tear myself away, and that sort of thing." So the Hon. Captain slipped out, with a whispered word to Mrs. Blyth, which appearance of intimacy rather "riled" her hostess.

Mr. Blyth now approached Madeline, coffee-cup in hand, and as he looked down upon her it suddenly flashed into her memory where and how she had seen him before—even in poor Kit's Gravesend lodging, where he had lorded it over their penury, and treated Madeline as the ruler of some casual ward might the perishing applicant for temporary relief. She was not sure that

he recognised her, so she kept silent and quiet till he addressed her; and after a few remarks, complimented her on her command of the French language. "I thought you had been at school at Clapham?"

"I was originally, but afterwards at Paris."

"Indeed. How long is it since you were at Clapham?"

"Oh! quite four years."

"And you used often to come over to your grandmamma's?"

"No, not very often," said Madeline, wondering at the drift of this conversation.

"But you had holidays sometimes, when grandma' used to come for you, and drive you back in the carriage?"

"No, indeed," said Madeline, laughing, "I generally travelled in a much more plebeian fashion by the omnibus."

"Still you were glad of the journey, I daresay," he continued, with paternal benevolence.

"I was indeed. And well remember my first holiday and the joy of every incident; though an omnibus in July is not the most agreeable mode of conveyance."

"Hum! ah! July was it?" said Mr. Blyth, and fell into deep thought—so deep that the approach of O'Keefe did not disturb him.

"Don't be wasting your time on that case-hardened old lawyer," he said, "but delight the company with a song. I'll engage ye sing like an angel, or a thrush, which is much the same—haven't they both wings—and here is your old friend M. Delille just dyin' to regale his ears."

"My old friend!" said Madeline, laughing; "I never had the pleasure of speaking to M. Delille before."

"Well, I'll take long odds it's not the last time you'll have that pleasure," returned O'Keefe, with a look so significant that it called the indignant colour to Madeline's cheek and brow; then, remembering the uselessness of anger against so elastic a personage, she smiled.

"Come, now, I am sure you'll give us 'The Harp that once through Tara's Halls.'"

"Yes, Madeline," said Mrs. Redman, sailing up at that moment, "do give us a song."

But Mrs. Redman's dinner party has stretched into undue proportions. Suffice it to say, that Madeline's was a complete triumph. The O'Keefe declared her patriotic fire would raise all Ireland from the sleep of ages; while M. Delille protested that of all foreigners hers was the only "*timbre de voix*" he had ever heard that would do justice to the charming "*romans*" of his country. Miss Comerford played a piece by Thalberg, and a march by something "ski;" but no one listened, and Mr.

Comerford began to suspect the cost of his daughter's education was money irretrievably lost. The most remarkable incident of the evening, however, was the introduction of Mrs. Blyth by her husband to Madeline, and the offer of a set-down in their carriage, which was gratefully accepted, while The O'Keefe and M. Delille attended her, bare-headed, to the carriage.

"Well!" cried Mrs. John, when the last guest had departed, as she threw herself into an easy chair. "Well, I never! Now, you mind what I say, John; there's something I can't make out about that niece of yours; but if she does not do well yet, I have no more faith in beginnings. That Frenchman is gone. O'Keefe just made an idiot of himself—that's nothing new; but Mr. and Mrs. Blyth, to take her home in their own carriage, I declare to goodness I never."

CHAPTER XXIX.

HUGH ELLIOTT had finished his dinner, and lay back in his easy chair before the fire, one foot on the hob, one hand supporting his head, the other hanging over the arm of the chair, the forefinger separating the pages of a quarterly where, unable longer to fix his thoughts, he had ceased to read.

He had sat long, absorbed in thought, not in clear conscious reflection, as was his wont, working out some mental problem step by step, or weighing with the mixture of boldness and caution peculiar to him, the pros and cons of some doubtful speculation. Now a confused multitude of bright fancies, in provoking variety and unbidable pertinacity, kept rolling in a thousand wavelets over his brain, the two dominant ideas being, a certain dark-eyed, golden-haired vision of female grace and harmony, and a picture of masculine uncouthness; the first of course represented by Madeline Digby, the second by Hugh Elliott.

Nevertheless he had by no means a low estimate of himself—what successful man ever has?—and hitherto he had felt a certain amount of easy security on the subject of marriage, not unnatural in a successful man. He had a decided intention to marry some day, for he had the usual wish to leave an inheritor of his name and property; but then his idea of a wife was a respectable well-dressed female, very quiet, and attentive to her business; a sort of junior partner, in fact, with a fair share of capital to put into the concern. She must be good-looking, for Elliott liked all his property to be sightly; but as for that choice of the heart which makes one, and only one, indispensable, at least for a time—the deep-lying sympathy that "grows with what it feeds upon," the quiet unspeakable joy in the looks, the voice, the touch, of one

truly, heartily, warmly loved—he did not ask for such things: why should he? How could the mute man of the stone age pine for the ornamental weapon of bronze? or the blind man complain of the want of colour he had never seen? These things were simply unknown to the cold, engrossed workman, raising with patient labour, stone by stone, the cairn of his fortunes. Yet, though cold, Hugh Elliott was not passionless—only the glacial period had not quite expired with him. An eminently practical man, the whole drift of omnipotent circumstances had tended to develope the material portion of his nature, while the warmer, the more imaginative, the better part, lay hidden under many a fathom of superincumbent strata. Silence, the habits induced by association with mere respectable animals, who did not absolutely conduct themselves like "Circe's rabble rout," simply because the aforesaid rout would at the present time have ended their saturnalia in the lock-up, and total loss of character (which means cash) in the City, had suspended animation in the higher faculties, but they had not necessarily died out; one thing was immensely in favour of Hugh Elliott's future, if his life was cold and dry, it was not sensual. He could laugh or thrill at a jovial or a warlike ballad trolled forth by some ruggedly musical shipmate, and he could drink deep too, but here he stopped, and would soon have renounced this last indulgence had it occasioned him any inconvenience, but he had a head of iron, I should say, a stomach of iron. And now the shimmering light from a new luminary began to throw its first broken rosy rays over the void of his moral world.

That first meeting with Madeline. How often he had recalled its very minutiæ! The sudden start, the momentary look, betraying so much bitter disappointment, the brave resigned bearing, as she gathered herself up from the blow, and with gentle dignity hid the wounds.

Then what a strange longing to befriend her seized him, and overmastered him. It was not (how often he told himself, and not altogether without truth), it was not because she was young and pretty, but because he could see in her that most touching combination, a brave tender heart, a bold spirit, and a fragile frame, ready to bend under burdens that yet would be borne unmurmuringly.

For Hugh Elliott, like other mute men of action, had a strange instinctive knowledge of character. And then his half disappointment to find her so independent, yet *was* she independent? She had evidently little but what she could earn, and that was a poor stay, yet she was well connected—that John Redman of Corbet Court was a man of substance, and of judgment too, for the last colonial wool sales, did he not defer and bow down to Mr.

Elliott's opinion? Miss Foster too, her means of existence were a mystery to Hugh. He must find out all about them. It was curious how, in Miss Digby's society, he felt himself unmoored, as it were, from his rightful anchorage. He was just as important a man as ever, yet he dwindled to nothing. He could not speak even with the small amount of fluency he usually possessed. While she—how graceful! how at ease! how friendly! yet how subtilely overpowering! He chafed against her; he felt half indignant with her; and yet in his heart of hearts how he pined for a glimpse of her. He looked at his watch—eight thirty—and it would be nine before he could reach Kent Terrace. No! it would be too late, he must give it up for to-night—but to-morrow! yes, certainly to-morrow.

Then Mr. Elliott threw away his quarterly, and after drumming with the top of his silver pencil case against his large, strong, white teeth, drew over a newspaper and began scribbling rough calculations on the margin. He put only figures; but of course an author is in the hero's confidence, and I am base enough to betray it. He was trying to arrive at some idea of the expenses of a married man and householder on a respectable footing. Alas! a thousand a year would go but a small way towards maintaining that reputation for wealth which (from no ostentatious motives), he was anxious to uphold. "It would be madness to marry a woman without money—*I* cannot afford it, at any rate!" and he threw away the newspaper in disgust. While to show the folly of imaginary estimates, I reveal one item—for the future Mrs. Elliott's pin-money, thirty pounds a-year. He should then have married an aboriginal Australian, *she* might have managed on it.

The settlement of Mr. and Mrs. Downing in London afforded Madeline a new pleasure. To spend an afternoon with Jessie and her baby; to dance or rock the soft cooing thing, and enjoy the mother's pleasure in it, filled Madeline with a tender regret never to have known her own mother. And what a pang it must have been to that young mother to have left her child in the helpless, though kindly, hands of the ex-cavalry captain. "Yes, poverty is a great evil," was generally the conclusion of her reveries on this topic; "at least hopeless poverty." And then certain grave pictures of her own possible difficulties would rise before her, and induce some immediate act of economy or self-denial; difficult to manage where the whole scale of life was frugal and self-denying.

The Downings had taken a pretty little semi-detached villa, not far from the more magnificent neighbourhood of Warwick Crescent, and here the modest furniture of Woodbine Cottage had been removed. It was a time of hard work, and I fear hard

words, for Jessie; for Mr. Downing disliked outlay of all kinds, and also discomfort; then the baby wanted more attention than the over-tasked mother could well bestow. So Madeline was a "real blessing" when she could steal half a day from her proper avocations to share and lighten her friend's labours, and often would she stay on to share Mr. Downing's tea—albeit, by no means enjoying his society; but she generally managed to put him into good humour, for she had by some mysterious means been reinstated in that gentleman's favour since a worthy citizen of "credit and renown," like Mr. John Redman, had acknowledged her as a relative, and even asked her to a state dinner. There was little or no argument, or other disturbance between them, as Madeline always tried to rub him the right way for Jessie's sake, caring too little about his opinions to contradict him. Miss Foster, too, was soon adopted by the friends as one of them, and quickly found favour in Mr. Downing's eyes as a good sort of creature, which, being interpreted, meant that Miss Foster looked up to Mr. A. Downing as a fine young man, and altogether a superior being.

Mrs. Comerford's account of Mrs. John's entertainment afforded much matter of scandal and surmise to old Mrs. Redman. That Madeline should have been invited at all was an act of deliberate and premeditated insult to her, the head of the house. "Well, it's all very fine Mrs. John taking her up in that way, but when her recklessness and extravagance have reduced her to beggary, I wonder will she stick by her then," said grandma', nodding her head portentously. "She needn't come to me, after throwing me off as she has done."

"No, indeed, ma'am," returned Miss Sharp, companion No. 2; a short, sharp, wiry little woman, with keen light grey eyes, tight cork-screw curls, and thin angular figure. "I'm sure Mrs. Redman is just worn out with all the worry about Miss Digby, and how she bore up so long against the impositions of that Miss Foster, it's a wonder to think of."

"I certainly think that no one could be worse treated, and ugh! ugh!—" A troublesome cough interrupted the old lady; "Just run up and bring my lozenges, Miss Sharp!" she ejaculated.

"Run up for your lozenges?" repeated Miss Sharp, with the keenest note of interrogation. "Well, ma'am, I think—considering you are well aware of the state of my heart—you might have spared me; however (with an air of resignation) I will ring the bell for Sarah! Your mother," turning to Mrs. Comerford, "has been so used to a woman like Miss Foster, who doesn't seem to have known what was due either to herself or her employer, that I never know what is coming."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs Redman, querulously, yet apologeti-

cally; "I never knew there was anything the matter with your heart."

"And I'm sure I shall be delighted to fetch your lozenges," said Mrs. Comerford.

"I understand the insinuation," cried Miss Sharp, bristling up. Whereupon both ladies apologised, and disclaimed in a breath, and after a while peace and tea were proclaimed.

"Well, and what had you for dinner?" asked grandmamma, returning to her mutton.

"Oh, it was really a sumptuous repast," replied Mrs. Comerford, and plunged into particulars, concluding with "everything in the greatest style, I assure you; but nothing to surpass Madeline Digby's dress: pearl grey silk, and such lace! worth a guinea a yard, if it was worth sixpence!"

"What do you think of that?" said Mrs. Redman.

"I am not a *bit* surprised," said Miss Sharp, shutting down the teapot with a snap.

"Mrs. John was very fine, too," resumed Mrs. Comerford: "so was Mrs. Blyth, and that noisy and rackety it was enough to make your head split—I mean Mrs. John; but I must say the way Madeline Digby carried on with a Frenchman, whom it seems she knew in Paris, was extraordinary. I suppose it's French manners; but *I* did not understand it. Of course she chatted away in French, and when he tried to speak to Susan Jane, told him he must speak English; and she understanding every word they said. Then Mrs. John made her sing; and she sang just like an actress, I declare—such an exhibition; and the Frenchman and a very strange man, a Mr. O'Keefe, went into such raptures. I'm sure I do not know where John finds such people. He never *used* to know them."

"They are all *her* friends," snapped Mrs. Redman. "His people were always respectable."

"Well, what with new faces and new fashions, I felt quite out of place," said Mrs. Comerford.

"I daresay you did," returned Miss Sharp, with doubtful sympathy.

"It seems," resumed Mrs. C., "that all these people are directors of that company John has joined."

"I don't like it," said Mrs. Redman, seizing a piece of buttered toast. "His father never was in a company. It will end badly. But what I want to know is, how that poor creature Miss Foster, and Madeline Digby, manage to get on. I know that Miss Foster had a trifle in the Three per Cents.; but then lodging and living run away with a good deal of money, and dressing, too—as you say she dresses."

Mrs. John says "Madeline has more pupils than she can attend to, and is out every night in the highest society."

"That's all very fine," returned Mrs. Redman; "but mark my words, they'll come to want yet, and *then* they will fall back on *me*."

And if a sincere, though unuttered, desire could bring about the fulfilment of a prophecy, there were dark days in store for the unoffending partners of Kent Terrace, New Road.

CHAPTER XXX.

DINNER was over in "The O'Keefe's" consular residence—a modest pair of parlours in a small street off the Strand. And the great man was regaling himself with a cheroot, while a tumbler of his native beverage—whiskey punch—steamed at his elbow. His countenance bore an expression of calm content as he contemplated the light smoke-wreaths which floated round him. His tranquillity was broken by a loud and irregular knock at the front door, followed by a foreign voice, asking for "Mons. O'Keefe." "It's that rackety devil, Delille," muttered the great "O'," taking his cigar from his lips, and emitting a large puff of smoke. "There's three first-rate Manillas as good as gone, to say nothing of a mountain of moonshine in the way of talk."

"Halloa!" he cried, directly the head of M. Delille appeared at the door. "Enter always, my friend! Why, what have you? You look upset!" for M. Delille presented an angry aspect; his wild black eyes were flashing, his hands clutched, and inarticulate sounds, something like "*'cre-re-re*," issuing from his lips.

"Upset, my friend!" he repeated, pacing up and down the narrow limits of O'Keefe's front parlour. "I well believe it, but also insulted! insulted by that tipe of all that is detestable in British character, Monsieur John Redman. Listen, my friend! I will no more serve the company while that base tyrant is on the direction! More! you shall forthwith demand that he shall give me the satisfaction due to my offended honour!"

The O'Keefe gave a long whistle, and removed his legs from a chair which had supported them:

"Call out John Redman! Why, you might as well call out Aldgate pump, for all the chance there is of his coming! A City man fight a duel! faith it's the best joke I've heard this many a day! There, don't look as if you were going to eat me, but take a chair and a weed, and tell me what it is all about."

"Ah, O'Keefe, my good friend!" exclaimed the Frenchman, relaxing from wrath into pathos, "you behold the most miserable of mortals, the sport of a cruel destiny, driven by the most adverse circumstances to desperation."

"God bless us!" ejaculated O'Keefe, in English, while he occupied himself searching for a pin wherewith to pierce the end of a fresh cigar.

"You know the story of my first meeting with that angel of beauty and goodness, Mademoiselle Madeline; how perverse fate interfered between us, or she would now be my adored wife?"

"Or you'd have been adoring somebody else's wife," interrupted O'Keefe. "Yes, I know all about it. Haven't you told me three times over already?"

"Imagine my feelings when the estimable Madame Redman directed me to conduct her to the *salle à manger*. *Mon Dieu!*"

"I have imagined that three times also."

"Monsieur," said Delille, rising with dignity. "Excuse me; I thought I was speaking to a sympathizing friend."

"Sit down, *mon beau!* Don't be so hot and hasty. I *am* your friend, and sympathize with you from below the bottom of my heart; but if I am to carry a message to Mr. Redman, is it unreasonable in me to ask what it's about? And if you go off raving about that charming Miss Digby (and I don't deny that she is charming), how are you to explain? Now sit down like a *bon camarade*. I've some first-rate seltzer water; have a little, with just a suspicion of brandy in it? Here" (opening the door, and shouting), "Maria, Theresa, Charlotte, Elizabeth—What's-your name? bring a bottle of seltzer and a glass; mind, the big glass."

"Yes, sir," returned the slip-shod slavey, running eagerly to do his bidding. Servants—female servants especially—doted on The O'Keefe.

"Now, be a good boy, and don't mind me; I can't help a bit of a joke. Ah! Delille, *mon ami*, the laugh and the joke have lifted me over many a crooked turn."

"My friend," returned the Frenchman, with effusion, "you are a good heart, though too cynical; but, if you had had patience, you would have heard how essential was the mention of Miss Digby. You know, then, that the vivid impression produced upon me by the one short glimpse vouchsafed to me of her in Paris, just two years ago, had partially effaced itself. I had renounced the project of marriage. I even told myself it must be an inconvenience—a sort of stupidity leading to many *contretemps*—to be passionately enamoured of one's proper wife. The disturbance of passion is hardly suited to the tranquillity and pure esteem which should exist in the retirement of family life."

"There's a great deal of truth in what you say," replied O'Keefe, gravely; (puff, puff) "you have reason; try the seltzer water. Time will show what he is at, I suppose!" he muttered in English.

"But ah!" continued M. Delille, rising and again pacing the room; "What chance has the voice of reason against the wild impulse of the heart? When my eyes encountered hers I felt that our fate was fixed. I say ours, my friend, for she reciprocates my love! I know it; though to her pure heart—innocent as it is—her own sensations are, no doubt, a mystery. O'Keefe!" cried the fiery Frenchman, suddenly pausing opposite his host, and trying to grasp his short hair, "will it be for me to reveal the mystery to that soft angel, whose divine simplicity is her highest defence?"

"Faith, I'd advise ye not to try," muttered O'Keefe to his tumbler; "your soft angel has a spice of the devil in her, or I'm much mistaken."

"Speak!" cried his interrogator.

"How can I tell? I'm sure there couldn't be a better interpreter."

"Ah! you are a true friend," said Delille, pressing his hand. "Listen, then! convinced that life was insupportable without the *belle* Madeline, and knowing my fortunes were still not assured, though I have the prospect of unbounded riches when the enlightened ruler of my country has time to consider my superb project of an iron road to Timbuctoo, I thought in an affair of this kind, even in this ill-arranged country, I should address myself to M., her uncle. I therefore presented myself at Warwick Crescent, and was well received by madame. M. Redman had just returned from the City, and on my requesting a private interview, he accorded it at once. I then explained my position and prospects, declared my profound devotion to his adorable niece, and begged to be informed what *dot* he would give on the occasion of her marriage. He is thick, that M. Redmans; and it was long ere he comprehended; then he broke out in language which, my faith! I tremble with fury to remember. He renounced that angel, he reviled her; he said it was a *ruse* between us to extract money from him; that he had nothing to do with her; that she was a beggar; that she had refused a good marriage for no sufficient reason, and that if she married me we should be a pair of beggars together; that he knew nothing about me—*me*—an officer of the French army! and, a thousand thunders! showered insults upon me! Raise thyself, O'Keefe! seek out this brigand, and give him my *cartel!*" and M. Delille shook the great "O'" till his huge form vibrated.

"He is crazy," thought the Irishman, looking with something like serious concern at the excited creature, who almost foamed at the mouth. "Hold!" he said aloud. "It is, indeed, unworthy conduct; but perhaps Redman was angry, and didn't know what he was saying; any way, I'll see him, and bring you an ample apology; will that do?"

"Ah, my friend, the worst is to come! I am ordered to proceed to the new mines in Brittany, to prepare a report for the general meeting of this accursed company; nay, more, to establish myself there for the permanent surveillance of the works. And I must leave her? No! *Par Dieu!* I shall renounce the infernal shackles of the tyrant Redmans—I will——"

"Hold a bit!" interrupted O'Keefe. "What do they pay you?"

"Five thousand francs a-year."

"And what have you besides?"

The Frenchman sat down, covered his face with one hand, and waved the other despairingly.

"I thought so. Well now, suppose you try what change of air and scene will do for a short time; you know you couldn't live on two hundred a-year with a wife. You go away for a while, and when you come back God knows what may have happened; you may be able to marry, but whatever you do don't quarrel with your bread and butter. Try another bottle?"

The Frenchman shook his head, but seemed to listen to his friend's representations, for O'Keefe continued to impress the folly of his intentions on M. Delille. At last he exclaimed, "But the *belle ange* herself!—what will she think of me leaving like a dastard?"

"Why, she can't think much of one interview."

"One interview," cried Delille. "Why, I have met her several times since at that little engineer's, M. Downing's; he has a wife the most interesting."

"Whew!" whistled O'Keefe.

"Nay, more. I have penetrated into the sacred privacy of her apartments, with Madame Downing—and—and—she must know it is my intention to demand her as my wife. There is an estimable lady of a certain age resides with her, and a dog of a cousin, a true John Bull, hard and stiff, like a log of oak, was visiting this lady, a M. Elliott—he would not be a pretender, eh! O'Keefe?"

"Is it Elliott of Size Lane? Not he! he is engaged, to my certain knowledge, to Miss Grainger—Grainger, Gubbins & Co.—the great banker's daughter; he has but two, and they have a million between them. What do you think of that, Delille? Suppose you go in for the other one?" If I could get him on a new tack, thought O'Keefe.

"Do you also mean to insult me?" he returned, with melancholy deliberation. "My destiny is fixed—only I am the victim of circumstances. How—how shall I explain my departure to Madeline?"

"Just write her an elegant letter; tell her you are torn to

pieces, and all that, that you go to make a fortune and will return to claim her; you know you are neither bound to make the fortune nor to return."

"Ah! what a counsellor," exclaimed the versatile Frenchman. "I will write even now; but stay, would it not be better to see her?"

A long discussion ensued; but at length O'Keefe persuaded the enamoured Gaul to write, to make up his mind to obey orders, and to depart on his mission immediately.

"Thank God he is gone!" said the great "O'," when at length alone, as he put the cork in the brandy bottle and rang for Charlotte Elizabeth to clear away. "I'll be glad when he is off; there's something mighty quare about him; old Everard Digby's granddaughter look at him, set him up, faith!—I wonder how she came to be related to those mushroom Redmans. I must find out. Any how she is a real darlint, and no mistake. If I was sure Donna O'Keefe was under the sod I wouldn't mind trying my own luck. Well, it may be mighty inconvenient to be in love with your own wife, but it's a deuced deal more inconvenient not to know whether she's dead or alive. Here, Maria Theresa! bring me my best boots and some warm water. I'll just look in at Mrs. Blyth's 'small and early,' there's a perfect treasury of widows, snug and warm too, to be met with at that house—but where's the use of wishing?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

Spring had now advanced a stage, and Madeline and Miss Foster were rejoicing that a fire was no longer necessary, except for their evening meal. The partners were strict economists, and had spun out their little capital of thirty pounds wonderfully. They had been together for nearly three months—the three happiest months (apart from stings of memory) that Madeline had ever known—and now some of her pupils were leaving town; consequently, she began to re eive the sweetest morsel that can be enjoyed in the shape of income—money honestly earned. Miss Foster, too, had received her magnificent half-year's interest of fifteen pounds, which was religiously put away to meet the weekly rent.

"I have only two lessons to give this morning," said Madeline, as she assisted Miss Foster to put away the breakfast things; "so I shall be back quite early; let us look over our accounts, and set all things in order."

"Yes, certainly," returned Miss Foster, with remarkable alacrity. "I will have the books and all ready when you return."

"Why, aunty, you look tremendously significant! I am certain you have a fortune concealed somewhere."

Miss Foster laughed gaily; a very different laugh from the nervous simper that used to make her worn face more sad at Mrs. Redman's. And Madeline went away happily enough.

On her return she found her writing materials and account book duly set forth, and the two friends set to work to examine it. The sum total was soon arrived at.

"Now for the funds," said Madeline, gaily. "Give an account of your stewardship, aunty."

"Well," returned the elder partner, "I have only five shillings left of our thirty pounds!"

"And I have two, and six postage stamps," added Madeline. "However, we have the rent secure for nearly six months to come, thank God; let nothing touch that; and here are five pounds paid me yesterday."

"And here," cried Miss Foster, almost trembling with joy and eagerness, "are three more which I earned myself. Oh! I have had such work to hold my tongue, that I might surprise you, but I did."

"Why you mysterious aunty," said Madeline, kissing her. "What have you been doing? Robbing a church?"

"Well, you see, dear, I used to feel it very much, you going out slaving yourself, and I sitting at home idle. So one day I was speaking to Rumble, she happened to mention that her daughter, before she was married, used to earn nearly ten shillings a week making gimp and cord trimmings; so I went to several places in the City and had great difficulty in getting anything; but now I am considered a first-rate hand, I assure you," said Miss Foster, with honest pride, "especially in shoulder trimmings."

"Dearest friend!" exclaimed Madeline, taking her thin hand tenderly and reverently in hers, "I am so glad for you, that you should share my pleasure in providing for our natural wants; but, indeed, indeed, you must not work yourself too much; you know you are but frail, and you know, too, how precious and important your life is to me, so be careful." The tears stood in Miss Foster's eyes

What merciful guiding was this of the Great Ruler of life, to lead her out of the stony howling wilderness into so warm, and verdant, and sheltered a nook as Madeline's genial loving nature made of their poor lodging? There is marvellous beauty in the tenderness sometimes (though rarely) shown by strength and ability to mediocre weakness—the broad and just acknowledgment that the humblest and poorest (intellectually) have an indisputable right to their individuality; not the mere material generosity that would cast them "food enough and to spare," but the bene-

ficence that treats all that is good in them with respect, lifting them up in their own esteem; setting them, as it were, on their own feet, and assisting to keep them there, not letting them think they are too unsteady to stand upright or alone—the minute forbearance that will not break the bruised reed! This *is* ideal justice, the fruit of self-control. "Lord of himself, that heritage of woe," sings our great cynical poet; that most noble heritage, rather—"lord of himself," in the sense of self-command. What grander position could any man attain? with passion, pride, avarice, physical strength, and its attendant appetites—self-love, ambition—for servants, and *what* servants? like the crown vassals of some feudal monarch: a magnificent following, but loyal only in proportion to the iron will that rules them—the strength of the commonwealth—each indispensable, and hurtful only when in excess.

Meantime Madeline released Miss Foster's hand, and resumed her pen:

"We have then eight pounds in the treasury chest, and there are nearly ten due to me; the coming quarter is almost provided for, independent of my new pupils (for I have another engagement offered me, aunty). If we can but keep out of debt, and have a little put by for the dull 'out of season' time, we shall do well. I must increase my *clientelle*. You know Lady Rawson is so good, and works so hard for me. I wish, aunty dear, that poor Jessie was as happy as we are! but there is no rest in her life; and that, that poor coxcomb of a husband. No! I cannot help despising him! He is so tyrannical and exacting; it does vex me to hear him at rare intervals, when he is in good humour—not when *she* specially deserves it—throw her some crumb of notice or approbation, which she is ready to crawl on her hands and knees to pick up. It's not right; she cannot be happy!"

"I think she is, dear," returned Miss Foster. "She quite adores Mr. Downing. (He really is a most agreeable, clever young man.) And then she has the baby."

"Well, I hope she is! Poor Jessie! I used to envy her in days of yore. I would not like to change with her now."

"Yet I should not like you to be an old maid, Madeline dear!"

"No, of course you would not," said Lady Rawson, in her clear, cheery voice; entering unperceived by the friends, she caught the last remark. "Spoken like a woman of sense and of the world. Nevertheless, this Madeline is likely enough to be one if she yields to her natural eccentricities as she does. What is the meaning of your refusing my little party, madam?" she continued, shaking hands cordially with Madeline.

"Ah! Lady Rawson, I am so glad to see you! It is so long since we met!"

"Well, I really have been in such a whirl ever since I came back

to town after Easter that I have not even had time to write you a note; so I was determined to have a good long talk with you to-day, and came over in a cab. Now I will just take off my bonnet —these April days begin to be warm."

So Lady Rawson took off an ethereal arrangement of tulle and green foliage, and settling herself into an old horsehair-covered *un*-easy chair, faintly disguised by an elaborate anti-macassar, proceeded to put Madeline through a cross-examination.

"You see I did not forget you. The Wandesfordes wrote to you? Yes, they are quite pleased! The children say they never enjoyed music lessons before. And how is the grandmamma? Has she made any sign yet? What a hardened old woman she must be! You have been counting out your money, I see. My dear girl, I trust you are getting on well. Life is a rude battle for a young thing, yet it is better then than when you are old. Anything more of the omnibus man? I imagine he is a trump."

"My cousin, Mr. Hugh Elliott," put in Miss Foster, with gentle and pardonable exultation, "is most kind and attentive. He often comes in of an evening, on his way from the City. He likes to converse with me on our mutual relatives, and to hear Madeline sing Scotch ballads."

"I dare say he does," returned Lady Rawson, thoughtfully. "I dare say he does."

"And I am succeeding wonderfully," said Madeline, drawing a chair by Lady Rawson's side. "How much of that success I owe to you! What a valuable friend you have been to me! Ah! dear Lady Rawson, what a different light success, even in my small ways, throws on the world."

"It does, indeed, child! But all this time, what have you been doing? and what do you mean by refusing my invitation? Little Fitz reports that the last day he called he encountered a terrific Frenchman, of tigerish aspect, who interfered with your practice, and made eyes at 'mademoiselle!'"

"Yes," said Madeline, laughing; "M. Delille, the gentleman to whom my French aunt wanted to marry me!"

"Ah! ah!" cried Lady Rawson. "And your English aunt," waving her hand towards Miss Foster, "is she going to take up the same line of action?"

"I imagine not," returned Madeline; "at least, I think she would find it difficult to arrange, especially now that Monsieur knows I am *sans dot*."

"That is very likely. Now, Madeline, you must come to me on the first. You may with safety," added Lady Rawson, with a significant nod, which called the colour to Madeline's cheek, and made her compress her lips as with sudden pain. "You shall be free from all offence." She stopped abruptly, catching a puzzled ex-

pression in Miss Foster's face. "You know it will be of use to you, for though you may not be sufficiently known to get evening engagements this year, they may come next season."

"You need say no more," said Madeline, quickly, "I shall be most happy to do your bidding."

"Well, you had better meet little Fitz and Signor Leonidas at my house on Wednesday, and arrange a programme."

"Certainly," returned Madeline. "Perhaps"—but her further utterance was cut short by the entrance of "Hemma," with a letter.

"For you, Madeline," said Miss Foster, handing it to her.

"It is a square foreign-looking thing, and on thin paper," she replied.

"Open it, and don't speculate," returned Lady Rawson.

Thus exhorted, Madeline broke the seal, and glancing at the signature, exclaimed, in much surprise:

"Alphonse Delille! What can he be writing?" Then, spreading the letter before her, read aloud as follows:—

"Beautiful and adored angel! with a heart torn by contending emotions I address thee, not having the courage to behold thy beauty again before exiling myself frem the heaven of thy society. Fate has destined us for each other; and though once more cruel circumstances separate us, I go; but to return again. Thou must have seen the profound and tender passion which consumes me. Nay, more; I feel it is regarded with gentle consideration by thy noble soul. I therefore desire to place under your eyes the motives which actuate me. I have still my fortune to make, and how could *I*, who would fain lay worlds at thy feet, ask thee to share my poverty. But I have hopes the most brilliant. I go to realize them. In another year I shall return with those hopes fulfilled—and then,—if thou, adored one! will but keep thy faith to thy devoted and distracted Alphonse, he will then hasten to lavish his wealth upon thee, and make thee his own. The reputation I bear in the French army, and also with thy uncle, through my connection with the renowned company which he directs, will be my guarantee. To thy sympathising ear I confide it, that though magnificent in design, the I.C.S. Company accord but the miserable salary of five thousand francs to their capable and faithful officer. Judge then if I be not desolated. Adieu, my beloved! Pray for thy adoring lover, and

"Believe ever in
"The unalterable devotion of thy
"ALPHONSE DELILLE."

Madeline on concluding her lecture, laid down the letter with

an air of bewilderment; looked first at Lady Rawson, then at Miss Foster, and burst out laughing. In this she was quickly joined by Lady Rawson, who then exclaimed—

"You must have been flirting outrageously with this unfortunate man, Madeline."

"No, indeed, no!" cried Madeline, earnestly. "I had not the most remote idea—I mean serious idea—that he thought of me. I was amused at meeting him at Mrs. John's, and then he came to Downing's two or three evenings when I was there, and used to look at me uncomfortably; but I never dreamed of his proposing."

"Proposing!" echoed Lady Rawson. "He does nothing of the kind, he looks upon you as already his own—he only begs you to wait patiently, and to be constant."

"How audacious!" cried Madeline, yet more in mirth than anger.

"It is as well he is going out of the country though," said Lady Rawson, gravely; "he might be embarrassing and compromising. A girl's reputation is such a delicate morsel, especially in your position. I would have no objection to a French husband for you were he better provided with the 'wherewithal.'"

Conversation flowed on this topic for a while, and then Lady Rawson proceeded in her frank friendly way to question the partners as to their amount of capital, and financial condition, which was as frankly replied to.

"My dear, it is but a small provision," she said.

"But enough, dear friend," returned Madeline, "till more comes in."

"Yes," returned the woman of the world, "so long as you are in health, and your clothes don't wear out; but just think of appearances, and the price of a silk dress; why it is appalling! Well, Madeline, whenever you are desperately hard up, you know where to come for a five pound note."

"You are too, too good," returned Madeline, her eyes filling: "but I trust in God never to ask alms."

"Never lose sight of common sense," said Lady Rawson, impressively. "I hate every thing morbid, and an opportune loan from one who can spare the money, is not alms; besides, my dear child, I owe you that much for the sake—" her ladyship stopped, pulled up as it were on the edge of a precipice, and then added with a slight laugh, "for the sake of 'Auld Lang Syne.'"

Madeline coloured with the force of her eager desire to divine what lay below the brink on which Lady R. stopped. Though too well-bred even to hazard a spoken conjecture as to the amount of acquaintance or connection between her father and her friend, she had pondered the matter over and over again, longing, with a great yearning, to speak of that dear, weak, erring father, to one who had known him under happier auspices. Her eyes, with

all their mute eloquence, met Lady Rawson's, who slightly frowned and shook her head. Miss Foster, who was busy regulating and putting away the papers, money, and account-book, which lay about the table, took no heed, and Lady Rawson, after a few more suggestions respecting the musical arrangements for her party, and advice touching Mons. Delille and his pretensions, took leave of the friends, leaving as usual a sense of light and colour, cheerfulness and energy, behind her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE London season was quite over, the session breathing its last, and every soul gone out of town—that is every individual supposed to have a soul. All Madeline's pupils were in this category; some expected to be back towards the end of September; others were uncertain; some had gone to winter abroad; so her days were quite unoccupied, and not allowing herself the extravagance of a library subscription, she felt a little *triste* from want of occupation. However, by practising diligently, and clearing off all arrears of necessary needle-work, she managed to fill up her time, besides learning to make gimp and bead-work from Miss Foster—but even on this humble trade the season tells, and this was quite a "slack" time, as it is technically termed.

Mr. Elliott, too, was of late almost a stranger, and it was wonderful how much they missed the visits of the grave, earnest Northumbrian. He had become so much at home in their humble lodgings, they felt him to be such a true friend. His opinions had a certain weight, even with Madeline (who was by no means largely gifted with veneration), for they bore the stamp of patient honest thought, and there was even a sort of pathos about his lonely struggle, and slow, steady, upward toiling—his hard work and poor reward,—Madeline thought. Then of late he had been less stony and more sympathetic—less contemptuous in his estimate of pleasure and pleasant trifles, and more inclined to combat Madeline's antagonistic views in a candid, inquiring spirit, as if it were quite possible she might be right sometimes. To Miss Foster his manner had always been kindly and gentle. And so the partners missed him much. Madeline even talked of writing to remind him they had some books of his, and to ask what had become of him.

She had many other things to think about, however, and not always pleasant things. She thought that they had funds enough to manage for two, or even three months; but if, by that time, she was still without pupils, or had only recommenced, there was an abyss of debt before her and the gentle creature she had taken

under her protection. Often did she ponder how this was to be avoided, and anxiously did she watch for returning signs of life in the deserted quarter where they abode, determined at the first symptoms of animation to advertise at a cheaper rate than she originally taught, in order, by any means, to fill the dwindling purse.

But she was young and hopeful, and it was only at intervals that these uncomfortable anticipations oppressed her.

It was the end of August. Hugh Elliott had for some weeks been greatly engaged—first with the wool sales, which proved unusually profitable, and next with a careful examination and analysis of his own financial position. He looked carefully and narrowly into things, and behold they were very good! This examination was not merely a prudential measure—it was dictated by an object which had grown to be *the* object of his life. He now resolved the question of marriage in a far different spirit from that in which we saw him scribbling calculations on the margin of a newspaper a few months ago. Other considerations besides solidity and a reputation for wealth now presented themselves and overpowered their opponents.

This slight girl—this little moneyless Madeline—had cast a spell upon him, with her curious mixture of intellectual fire and womanly softness—her golden hair, and great dark eyes, out of which the bold frank spirit looked with such tranquil daring—her varying voice, that could ring with such a silvery expression of contempt, or melt into tones so tender that each word was a caress—with her alternations of brightness and languor—*she* it was who had changed the whole complexion of things.

Hugh Elliott had for some time resolved to try and win her, and this with his usual deliberation. Nor, could she have read his heart, was the love and life he was about to offer, unworthy of her or of himself. He was not the less ambitious, but he felt that she was a woman to help him by sympathy and understanding in the path he had marked out. And then, however high he might climb, there was no position she would not adorn, and no triumph that would not be barren without her.

If she would but love him! Ay!—there was the doubt—would she love him?

Well, this warm, glowing, yellow August evening, Hugh finished his work, and put away his books early. A strange elation seized him as he reviewed his life, and the wonderful success which had hitherto attended his undertakings. He felt that Madeline could not refuse him—that perhaps some colder motives might influence her at first—the security of a comfortable home—the rest from toil and uncertainty—but once let him enjoy the privileged intimacy of an engagement, and dare to speak out of

all his heart, and show his real self to her, she would soon learn to love!

Alas! Hugh Elliott little thought how well that lesson had been taught before. But not knowing it, he went home to his lodgings in a most enviable frame of mind. The lines about his mouth and brow were relaxed, his grave eyes had a kindly, genial look, very different from their old expression, and after trying to eat his dinner, he sallied forth, intending to stroll through Kensington Gardens to Kent Terrace, to enjoy one of the delicious contests of thought and opinion with Madeline, which had opened up to him such a new mental life.

Hugh Elliott then sallied forth with a sort of glow and sparkle pervading his spirit, and a sense of coming happiness; very delightful, nor always deceptive, as a mood like this often ensures its own fulfilment.

It was a glorious evening, the yellow level sunbeams striking in between the foliage, and streaking the dark trunks of the trees with gold. Very like the September sunset under which Madeline first met Dudley Ashurst. And now all that seemed to her as if it had happened in some other life, while she sat under a wide-spreading elm in the grand old gardens, watching with a dim sense of pleasure the drops of sunshine flecking the grass, as the faint breeze at intervals stirred the leaves. "It was gone, it was all passed by;" yet she could scarce blame herself. She had always been conscious that there was a great social gulf fixed between herself and a man of Ashurst's rank. She knew he could not marry her; but then she could not avoid his seeking her; and as to avoid loving him, she might as well strive to annihilate her proper nature. Yet, how inferior in quality was the love he had offered her. Was she, then, a thing so much beneath him that all his rank and power could not raise her? "Had he married me, I should have proved to be the proper stuff of which to make a countess," she thought, as a smile half-sad, half-contemptuous, moved her lips, while she reflected how rare was the knowledge of true values. "Yet there can be no standard for such things, each one has his own." She was a very charming picture as she sat thus: her gauze blue *barège* dress, black lace shawl, and little hood-like bonnet, also of black lace, with daisies and bluettes, making an effective toilette. She rested one elbow on the side of the seat, supporting her head on a small well-gloved hand, while the other held a parasol, with which she musingly traced figures in the gravel. The whole attitude bespoke languor and fatigue, and her eyes looked very dark and dreamy. Hugh Elliott thought fortune had specially favoured him when his eyes fell on her. He paused a moment to observe her, unnoticed, and thought with pride, how fair she was; of how proud he would be of her.

What a proud, soft, daring, timid darling she was; and so, with a glowing, beating heart, that would speak out in his eyes, he drew near and took her hand almost before she perceived him.

"Miss Digby, all alone! Where is Miss Foster?"

"Ah, Mr. Elliott! You have deserted us in a base and cruel manner," she returned, with a tranquil weary sort of smile. "We have had serious thoughts of following your example, and advertising for you. What have you been doing?"

"Oh, a great deal, I assure you! but I am freer now, and ready to bestow more of my company on you than perhaps you would care to have."

There was something different from his ordinary tone in his voice, which made Madeline look up with more of interest than she had as yet either felt or shown. "Were you coming to us now?" she asked; "I think Miss Foster will have returned by the time I get back. She went to do some shopping in the cool of the evening, and I walked over to Mrs. Williamson, to ask her when her school reassembled. Will you come with me, Mr. Elliott?"

Yes, Mr. Elliott would with pleasure; so they walked leisurely towards Edgware Road; not talking very fluently, for Madeline's thoughts were wandering, while Elliott was concentrating his, determining that, if on arriving at Kent Terrace Miss Foster was still absent, he would seize the opportunity, and ask Madeline to be his wife. These thoughts made the long walk seem alternately shorter and longer; but they reached their destination at last, and Miss Foster was still out.

The sitting-room felt cool and fresh; there was a perfume of flowers, and general air of feminine refinement, of graceful homeliness, pervading it, which always charmed Elliott.

"Pray sit down," said Madeline, herself sinking rather wearily on the sofa. "Miss Foster will be here soon, and would be vexed not to see you."

So saying she proceeded to remove her bonnet, and in doing so, unfastened her profuse golden hair, which fell in bright masses on her shoulders. She was not in the least embarrassed, but removing her gloves, proceeded to twist it up, talking all the time. "I was very much obliged to you for those two quarterlies, Mr. Elliott. When one has not much time to read they give you such a good general idea of what is going on in the literary world." Elliott made no reply. His eyes were fixed on the little white round hands, busy rolling up the wealth of hair so quickly and dexterously. "But I have quite done with them, and will give them to you to-night." Still no answer. Her words scarce reached Elliott's sense; he was thinking should he ever dare to take those little hands in his; and looking down into those eyes,

that seemed sad to-night, read love and trust there for him? He was surprised at the wild beating of his heart, and the species of resolute courage which had risen, from the fire of his own emotions, within him; he, who usually felt painfully, timidly, self-conscious in her presence. Yet how little she seemed to be aware of the tempest in his heart. Why did she not instinctively sympathise with his feelings? Still silent, he rose and paced the room. His silence, his unusual manner, startled Madeline. What had gone wrong? She watched him anxiously take one or two turns, and then said softly, "What is the matter with you, Mr. Elliott?" He stopped opposite to her, for a moment, his arms folded, drawn up to his full height, his sombre eyes alight with a glowing tenderness, his stern mouth quivering, a marvellous beauty transforming his whole face. "There is nothing the matter," he said at last slowly; "except that I love you, love you so much that I cannot speak it;" and without seeming to expect an answer he resumed his pacing up and down. Madeline was struck mute. She flushed all over, and then turned deadly pale. A wild sort of terror seized her. Was this man, this rich, rugged man, going to insult her also? If he dared, she would shiver his assumed superiority with bitter scorn, and cover him with contempt. Again he paused. "I am a rough, uncouth fellow, and perhaps I have been too abrupt with you, dear; but surely you are too bright, too clever, not to see there is something better below the surface. I fear you do not care much for me now; but try, Madeline. I know I could make a happy home for you." Madeline did not reply; she pushed back her hair, and looked up at him with almost painful earnestness. She did not yet feel certain of his meaning. "Speak to me," he said at length, clasping his hands together, and holding them out towards her with a gesture of unutterable entreaty. "Say that the idea of being my wife is not repugnant to you." Madeline drew a long breath, the colour came back to her cheek, tears sprang to her eyes. "How can I answer?" she said. "It is such an astonishment to me, that you should wish me to be your wife. *I*, who have nothing. And alas! I do not love you. I dare not accept you! How grieved I am to grieve you; but I cannot, I cannot be your wife;" and she covered her face with her hands, feeling guilty, she knew not of what.

"You think so now," cried Hugh Elliott, all self-love and pride forgotten in the intensity of his desire to win her; "but if we were indeed engaged, and you could see how you have become the world to me, how the right to be your friend and protector is all I care to live for—ah! Madeline, dear Madeline! surely you would learn to love me." All this was said almost in an undertone, with a kind of repressed passion, wonderfully impressive.

He did not dare to touch her hand. He stood before her, his arms folded, quiet in attitude, yet what wonderful force, in this controlled eagerness and fire.

"Alas, alas!" cried Madeline, "I too am unfortunate not to love you as you ought to be loved, for you are good and true! Do not distress yourself and me; leave me, and in your many occupations you will soon forget your present sorrow. But *I* will never forget you! There is at least one who could love me for myself alone! and I cannot love you in return." There was an inexpressible sadness in her voice, but also something in its tone that seemed suddenly to convince Elliott of the hopelessness of his suit.

"Is it all over then?" he said bitterly; "am I so distasteful that you prefer the toil and uncertainty of your present life, to a safe home and shelter in my arms." He stretched them out, as he spoke, towards her.

"Better anything than to mock you with the seeming I could not feel. No! Mr. Elliott you deserve better things than that."

"Well, I will intrude on you no longer," he returned gloomily, the light all fading away from his face, and leaving a dusky paleness behind. "I must e'en go back to my old life again," and he heaved a bitter sigh. "Good-bye, dear, good-bye," he took her hand in both of his, and held it first with almost painful force, then softly drew it towards him, and said, with a sad smile, looking down into her face, "Ah, Madeline! little slender thing, how will you fight the battle of life alone? If matters go hard with you, send for me! forget all about this, and if I keep away, as I will, I must! do not think that I would not come to help you with my whole heart, dear; my whole heart!", then he dropped her hand and went quietly away.

Madeline threw herself into a corner of the hard old sofa, and wept bitterly, passionately. This man whom she had passed by mentally, as a mere respectable money-getter, had seen through her proud brave bearing, seen, what at times she felt so keenly, that with all her wit and courage she was but a poor weak girl, who ought to be grateful for the protection of those stronger than herself! and now, even before the echo of his words had died upon her ear, she felt that she had acted unwisely. Yet she could not do otherwise! How could she take him into a heart still warm and glowing with the image of another! "Would to God I had met him first; he at least has a true heart! But I will never seek his aid come what may, and I feel as if all sorts of misfortunes would come."

Here Miss Foster entered with a scared face. "My dear! what has happened? I just met Mr. Elliott looking like a ghost, and all he would say, was, 'ask Miss Digby.'"

"Oh! aunty," cried Madeline, throwing herself into her arms, "I am so miserable."

Of course a sobbing broken explanation ensued.

Miss Foster's was a cruel disappointment, she had always anticipated a proposal from Hugh Elliott, but she had hoped and expected it would be by letter, when she thought she might have persuaded Madeline into at least considering the matter. Now her especial hero, the relative of whom she was so proud, had gone and overturned all her schemes. It was not like him, either, this precipitancy, and how foolish of Madeline to refuse! what could be her reason? of this, however, Miss Foster was too tender-hearted to say anything in Madeline's present distress, distress so great that Miss Foster began to gather hope. Possibly she was already regretting her hasty decision, and if so, it would not be difficult to lure Hugh Elliott back again, so she soothed and petted Madeline, and when they were calmer both sat down to that source of feminine comfort, a cup of tea.

"Aunty," cried Madeline suddenly, after looking at her attentively for a moment. "I am a selfish wretch to let you wait on me in this way, for you are looking ill and exhausted yourself; you change colour, indeed you have looked ill these two days, but to-night much worse. How do you feel?"

"A little faint and dizzy," returned Miss Foster with a languid smile, "but I often do in hot weather. It will pass off, a good night's rest will set me up."

"I trust you will get it," said Madeline, "last night you slept very little." And she was on the alert instantly, poor Hugh and her distress about him forgotten, for she felt an instinctive alarm, far beyond what the cause seemed to warrant. She tended her gentle companion with all her little skill, she summoned Mrs. Rumble to council. That potentate came with alacrity. Her second floor lodgers were decided favourites, though it is true that their frugal board left but little legitimate profits or pickings for a landlady, but then they paid with such regularity, their acquaintances were of so high an order of respectability, that, although it might have puzzled her to express it in words, Mrs. Rumble felt that their presence raised the character of her house, and was in itself a first-rate recommendation.

"I feel uneasy about Miss Foster, Mrs. Rumble," began Madeline in her unconscious tone of superiority and gentle command. "You have, no doubt, much experience! what would you recommend? she appears to have a cold, she shivers and feels hot and cold, don't you, dear?"

"Yes! It's just a bad cold," said Mrs. Rumble magisterially, as one who had a right to speak; "and every one knows a summer cold is much worse nor a winter cold. Now, I would just

bathe her feet mum, and when she is in bed give her a strong glass of gin-and-water, as hot as she can bear it." Poor Miss Foster, burning with heat, shuddered at the prescription. "A good perspiration would carry it off at once."

"Thank you," said Madeline. "We shall certainly bathe her feet, but about the gin-and-water? would it not be very unpleasant this warm evening?"

"Barley-water would do as well," put in the victim.

"Well, may be so," said Mrs. Rumble with solemn disapprobation, "but mind, it's not my recommending—a nasty, weakening, sloppy, tiresome thing to make."

"Oh!" said Madeline, catching the clue to her objection. "Will you then ask Emma to bring up some water for Miss Foster, and if she will light the fire here, I can get anything she wants. I have some idea of invalid cookery."

So poor Miss Foster had her barley-water; and by keeping the window and door of her sitting-room open, Madeline managed to preserve a tolerable temperature. But it was a restless night, and next day the invalid felt such an increased difficulty in breathing, that she ceased to oppose Madeline's wish to send for a doctor.

Mrs. Rumble was again called upon, and recommended *her* doctor, and an urgent message was despatched to Dr. Thorne, who fortunately lived in the neighbourhood. He was out, so more than an hour elapsed before he answered the summons.

Miss Foster had struggled to get up, in the vain hope of throwing off the tremulous weakness which oppressed her, but she could only lie back in the large chair, and watch Madeline as she moved about in the restlessness of anxiety. At last "Hemma" rushed in, exclaiming eagerly, "the doctor!" and immediately enter a little, spare, wiry man, with sandy hair and sharp eyes.

He entered unceremoniously; evidently not expecting to find very distinguished patients in Mrs. Rumble's second floor front. "Now then! how are we? what's the matter?" he said, in a cheery voice, aud rubbing his hands; but as his eyes fell on Madeline and her companion, an undefinable change passed over him, he bowed and took the chair Madeline placed for him beside the invalid. His well-put queries soon elicited all necessary information; then he produced his stethoscope; finally, he counted her pulse very carefully, and then ordered her to bed immediately. He himself prepared a mustard blister, and sent a prescription to a neighbouring chemist, to save time, he said.

The patient being made as comfortable as could be managed, the doctor retired to give special directions as to the nursing.

"You think her very ill—I see you do," said Madeline, anxiously.

"Yes; it is a sharp attack," he returned, always cheerily, "but she'll pull through *if* (strong emphasis) her strength be well kept up. She must have strong beef-tea and port wine; a little champagne occasionally, just to give a fillip; and constant watching, at any rate for a few days. Know any one who could relieve you, at night, for instance?"

"No!" returned Madeline, appalled at the programme laid before her. "But for a short time, I could manage quite well myself"

"My dear young lady, you can do nothing of the kind! You must not make yourself ill attending on—your mother? No: I thought not—well, your friend; in a day or two you will be asking me for a nurse. I have one in my eye that will just do."

"Doctor," said Madeline, determined to put matters in their true light—"I have youth and strength, but not much money. All that is essential shall be provided, but let us avoid expense as much as possible."

"I understand," he returned, "but I don't know how you will stand it. You must eat and drink too. She's gone off into a doze," he continued, peeping into the bed-room; "try and have some beef-tea ready when she wakes. I'll call round this evening and see how she goes on."

Shaking Madeline's hand cordially, the doctor hurried away, and Madeline, after a moment's pause to collect her thoughts, followed him down-stairs, to give directions and make arrangements with Mrs. Rumble; then she returned to her post beside her friend: to think of the terrible affliction that had befallen them, to count her slender resources, and reflect on the misfortune of Lady Rawson's indefinite absence—for Lady Rawson was the one friend on whose assistance she could count, or would accept—and then, how her heart melted with tenderness, as she looked at the delicate, worn face, hushed into an uneasy slumber. Was there much suffering before her? and was there danger for the humble, simple life, that had never harmed and yet had suffered?

"Oh!" thought Madeline, "if it is God's will to take her from me, I shall be indeed desolate! but I will not think of it; I will hope and be brave. Thank God—thank God—she is with me, and not tortured with the knowledge that she is an unwelcome burden to Mrs. Redman."

Here Miss Foster woke up and Madeline became absorbed in removing the mustard blister, and then had two or three runs up and down before the beef-tea and dry toast could be prepared, and when it came it was greasy, and Madeline could have cried with the vexation she must not speak.

Thus was our heroine plunged into all the trials, mental and

physical, which attend a sick room under any circumstances; but, when the difficulties of poverty are added, the trial is indeed great. To contend with disease is bad enough; but to find in every item of the day's life an enemy, is more than any strength, even the divine strength of love, can cope with. And Madeline was nurse and servant; ay, and cook into the bargain. As the weary days prolonged themselves into weeks, and still the friend so dear to her lay prostrate, her every breath an agony (for she was suffering from that painful complication, inflammation of the lungs and low fever), Madeline trembled for her own strength: if this terrible strain continued, what was to become of them! Even if she could hold out till Miss Foster recovered, what could she do if in turn her own health failed? And if she lost that dear, gentle, suffering, patient creature! But, from the desolation of this picture she wisely and resolutely turned. No! the taste of home she had known in her partnership with Miss Foster was so delightful, that she could not support the idea of its loss! So she endured; tending the sufferer with marvellous skill and forethought, bearing up bravely under great fatigue, and striving with wise consideration to keep up her own strength.

Their landlady, though a cold and calculating woman, was willing to earn a character for humanity and motherliness—as cheaply as she could, 'tis true—still the desire made her of some use to Madeline, whose mid-day watch she was always ready to relieve, and thus enable her to snatch a couple of hours of sleep. But a dark shade fixed itself under her eyes; her face grew wan and haggard; and though her lips retained their colour, they acquired an over-anxious, tremulous expression, most touching to the experienced eye of the doctor, whose care and attention were unremitting.

But the deepest of her secondary sources of anxiety was the rapid melting of the little hoard which was to tide them over the fruitless "out of season" period. Oh! those bottles of good port wine at tavern prices; those calves' feet, and the sherry and brandy combined. What sums they cost; and how short a time they lasted! to say nothing of smaller, but very perceptible drains, in the way of fees to the hard-worked servant, charges for the additional charwoman, gifts of tea to the same, and the doctor's bill looming in the distance. There were times when these accumulated burdens seemed to weigh Madeline to the earth; and then she would rouse again, and tell herself that she must perforce leave the future to take care of itself, and concentrate her whole being in the effort to bring her friend through the sore illness which lay upon her.

Yet Madeline was not neglected by her kinsfolk and acquain

tance during this trying time. Mrs. Moorcroft and Mrs. Downing brought offerings of abundant sympathy, and came and sat in the sitting-room, now a mere ante chamber to the sick room, and covered with the insignia of nurse-tending, where they wept over Miss Foster and impeded Madeline. What more could they do? Madeline would have starved before she would have named her sorest anxiety to them. True, Mrs. Moorcroft offered to share her toil and watching, with true motherly kindness; but, alas! the cost of another mouth would more than counterbalance the value of the help; so the friendly offer was gratefully declined. Mrs. John Redman came also, and exclaimed, "Law! how unfortunate!" and reported grandmamma Redman's view of the case, which was, that Miss Foster's illness was a just judgment on the partners for their contumacious contradiction and defiance of her (Mrs. Redman's) wishes, ideas, and principles. Moreover, after two visits, Mrs. John reappeared laden with a small basket, and radiant with consequential benevolence. "Here, Madeline, here are two bottles of most particular port I made John put out for Miss Foster; I'm sure I hope she'll get over it" (she meant the illness, not the port), "if it was only to reward you for all the trouble you take;" and Mrs. John extricated from her basket two dusty bottles with big white marks, depositing them triumphantly on the table, without suffering the smallest conscientious discomfort from the very decided misrepresentation she had just uttered; for it was Mr. John who of his own free will originally suggested them, and put them out that very morning. So Madeline thanked Mrs. John, and opened one shortly after, pleased at the attention and temporary relief, but, taking the precaution to taste before presenting a glass of it to her patient, found it to be an execrable compound of liquorice and alcohol, substituted by Mrs. John for the costly and particular port which she thought would better suit her own snug little luncheons with one or two especial favourites, than the inexperienced palate of a "poor thing" like Miss Foster. "I may be wrong, but this tastes like poison," thought Madeline; "I will make Dr. Thorne taste it." And, accordingly, the doctor issued particular orders that not a drop was to pass the patient's lips.

And poor Miss Fotser herself, sometimes unconscious, sometimes feverishly alive, how eagerly she clung to Madeline. How her filmy eyes watched her; and how the soft cool touch of her young nurse's hand soothed and comforted her.

How often a wordless prayerful blessing on her tender steady strength went up to heaven from the simple heart that so utterly trusted her.

At last the worst was over, and Madeline had her reward in seeing the disease stand still first, and then retrograde; the sinking

strength revive, and the balm of convalescence spread itself over the weary frame and spirit.

Then Madeline knew how shaken she was herself; and the good doctor, who had lavished care and time upon his patient in the "two pair back," with that practical benevolence which pervades the medical profession more largely, perhaps, than any other, pounced upon her one day, and insisted on feeling her pulse. "We will have you in bed next if we don't take care," he said in his sharp stinging way; and thereupon ordered her tonics, port wine, and change of air if possible.

Port wine, indeed! when poor Madeline knew that all which lay between them and destitution was twenty-five shillings and some pence. So she smiled on the doctor, and with gentle satire asked him if he did not think she ought to take horse exercise, or engage a carriage by the month and drive every day! He replied, laughing, in the same tone; but cautioned her gravely to be careful as he went away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was a week since Miss Foster was first lifted out of bed, to have it made, and she was at tea with Madeline in their sitting-room, once more restored to its ordinary neatness, and beautified to the utmost of its capabilities, in honour of their again taking tea together.

The invalid was propped up as comfortably as could be arranged in the one arm-chair which the room boasted. And Madeline, in her neat home attire, flitted to and fro; a bright smile on her lip, though she could not quite banish the look of care from her wan cheek and anxious eyes.

Not yet, however, dare she divulge their pressing necessities to Miss Foster, though while she waited on her with loving cheerful words and serene air, she resolved in her mind where she might best dispose, either by sale or pledge, of her few trinkets, and what fine lace remained to her.

Miss Foster was still in that happy state of weakness, which accepts without care or question the present, and its absolute relief or comfort.

"There is your tea, and a nice poached egg," said Madeline, arranging the plate and cup in the most convenient way, "and thank God I have you back to share my life, once more." "Yes, thank God!" murmured the invalid, "and thank God for you, as well as for life." She had scarcely uttered the words, when "Hemma" made her appearance with a card,—"Please'm, the gentleman wants to know if he may come up." Madeline looked

at the card, and flushed all over; it bore the name of Mr. Hugh Elliott!

Since that unfortunate evening when she rejected him, and Miss Foster's illness first showed itself, his name had never passed her lips, but he often occupied her thoughts; in those long midnight watchings, when Miss Foster lay half in sleep, half in unconsciousness, the only idea which drew her from her painful financial contemplations, was Hugh Elliott. Not the sombre rugged man whom she had at first watched with a sort of idle intellectual interest, but the man who had spoken out his heart to her with such unmistakable truth, such deep tenderness. How he had ennobled himself in her eyes; with what deep respect, what warm sympathy, she thought of him; and how she regretted that she had not known him before memory had raised a barrier between them, for she felt that if heart free, she must have been won by a character so real, so strong, so loving, when once roused. Oh! with what bitterness she reflected on the evil that Dudley Ashurst's fancy for her had wrought; but how charming to eye and ear he was; how different in the perfection of voice, and look, and manner, from the half-awkward shyness or rugged decision of Hugh Elliott! So she would work round and round the vexatious contradictions of her lot. Now, when the name was suddenly brought before her, she recalled, all fresh and vividly, the circumstances of their last meeting, and coloured all over with nervous shyness. She could scarce command her voice to say, with sufficient composure, to Miss Foster, "Mr. Elliott, can you see him?"

"Yes, certainly," was the prompt reply; and a minute or two later Hugh Elliott was standing before her. He looked thinner, browner, more sombre, and more rugged than ever. He took Madeline's hand in his, neither warmly nor coldly, but he looked beyond her to the invalid, to whose side he quickly passed. "I am truly grieved to hear of your severe illness," he said kindly, "I only knew of it to-day; I have been taking a holiday, a rare thing for me, and on my return was much occupied; this morning I met John Redman, who told me you had been laid up these six weeks, but you are better?"

Poor Miss Foster was quite overjoyed to see him; she held his hand long in hers, and feebly told him how she had suffered, and how lovingly and devotedly Madeline had nursed her.

"I can imagine it," returned Hugh Elliott, with one grave wistful glance at her, and growing pale as he spoke. She shivered with an emotion she could not control; what did it mean—that glance? Was it that he quietly, forgivingly resigned her? Well, she was sure he would soon console himself; indeed, he seemed to have done so, or tried, already, or what did this rare holiday mean; besides, he was not the stamp of man to whine or fret long

about any woman, and Madeline was glad of it, at least she told herself so. And then they fell into talk about Miss Foster's illness, and the doctor's kind care, and Mrs. Rumble's praiseworthy attention; and Elliott was not so embarrassed as Madeline, he did not often address her, but when he did, with a sort of grave softness. He said he had gone to visit his old Northumbrian home, and had seen Miss Foster's nephew. He had found few changes, nevertheless he spoke of everything warily, though he said he should like to have a summer retreat among those rugged hills and moors,—"They give such a feeling of wholesome strength, absolutely reviving, after the heat, the rush, the crowd of the City. I believe that we hard-working money-earners are utterly mistaken; what does our life give us after all?"

"That has been my theory," said Madeline, "but you always disputed it."

"Well, in theory you are right, perhaps," he returned, "but if we cannot get anything better than a barren success, why, we must take it and be thankful." And Madeline was silenced. Then Elliott, after stirring his tea moodily, said in a sudden way to Miss Foster, "She is looking a good deal cut up, you must make her take care of herself." Madeline knew that she was, herself. "I will try," replied Miss Foster. Soon after, Elliott rose to say good-bye. "You will come and see me again?" said Miss Foster, feebly trying to tie up the broken links. Madeline's heart beat with vexation, and an ardent desire to silence her friend, but Elliott shook his head,—"Not for some time," he said, smiling sadly, "I shall be hard at work, by-and-by I hope to be freer;" then he shook hands with Madeline, and, as if suddenly remembering it, returned to Miss Foster, and laid a letter beside her, saying—"No answer," then he left the room. Madeline and her friend looked at each other after he had gone. Miss Foster said, "I am so glad he came." Madeline made no reply; her head was bowed; her hands played idly with the ribbon of her apron. "But this letter,—what can it be? read it for me, Madeline."

"Perhaps he would not like it: perhaps he meant it for your eye only," said she, hesitatingly.

"My dear! he knows I tell you everything, and no doubt it is all about yourself."

"I am sure it is not," said Madeline with an air of sincere conviction.

"Well, I cannot read it," returned the invalid, lying back, and with an invalid's petulance.

So Madeline broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"MY DEAR MISS FOSTER,

"You have been long ill; and illness is costly. I do not

seek to pry into your affairs. but I know you must need help, and I claim a kinsman's right to give it. Enclosed are thirty pounds, and there's more where that came from, if required. It it pleases you to consider it a loan, do so; but repay me how and when you like. *I* would prefer your using the money and forgetting all about it. If I can ever be of use to you, don't hesitate to write to me; but I cannot come and see you: do not, however, attribute this to any want of kindly feeling on the part of your

"Cousin and sincere friend,

"HUGH ELLIOTT."

A business-like flourish distinguished the signature, and three ten-pound notes dropped from the letter as Madeline turned the page. When she ceased reading, her cheek was crimson and her eyes cast down. "Good gracious me," exclaimed Miss Foster, with feeble energy. "How kind! how generous! how nicely it will come in! Do you know, Madeline, I have been thinking and thinking how*ever* you have managed; and I get quite in a tremble whenever the doctor's bill comes across me; but now we can manage; do see and pay him at once, dear! Ah! what a friend the good God has sent us!"

"Yes," returned Madeline, her bosom heaving; "yes, most generous, most considerate! but, oh! so oppressive!" and she burst into tears. "My dear love," said Miss Foster, with uneasy gravity.

"Oh, I know I am foolish, very foolish," sobbed Madeline; "but I cannot help feeling humiliated to be obliged to take his money. He knows it will be gall and wormwood to me. He knows you and I are so closely linked, that good or evil to one falls equally on the other, and——"

"And," interrupted Miss Foster, with a sort of pettishness she would never have shown in health, "you would have him neglect a relation he regards, for fear he might offend you."

"No," returned Madeline, "I know he has done wisely and well. Moreover, I have no business to quarrel over a present to you; but I lament our poverty on this account more bitterly than I ever did before. But, dear aunty, I tell you what; when Lady Rawson comes home, I will borrow part of this horrid thirty pounds from her, to make a beginning, and then strive to earn the rest as fast as we can, and pay it back."

"Whatever you like, Madeline; but it seems to me that it would be as well to leave the whole debt in the hands of so kindly a creditor, instead of *asking* a loan to pay back what is certainly not wanted in a hurry."

"My own dear aunty, forgive my petulance; I do not feel quite like myself to-day. Yours is, no doubt, the common sense view of the matter, so let us talk no more about it—until we can

act, but, please God," she concluded, almost religiously, "please God we will repay him."

"Oh, I daresay we shall," replied Miss Foster, with comfortable indifference; "and now, Madeline, dear, I am very tired: I must go to bed."

Although Madeline felt keenly the discomfort of being under an obligation to a rejected suitor, a man, too, of whose inferiority to herself she had been vaguely convinced until their last painful interview, when she caught glimpses of a substratum of character, where the granite of strength was marbled with the gold of truth and tenderness.

Keenly, then, as she felt this discomfort, she could not but acknowledge that the subsidy which caused it was a most seasonable relief: she could pay the doctor's bill, a few other small matters, and yet have enough in hand to keep them for a month or six weeks, till old pupils returned, or fresh ones were found.

Lady Rawson was still absent, but about this time Madeline received a kind and characteristic letter from her; full of friendly interest and offers, and stating the writer's intention to pass the winter at Naples, where she found very pleasant society, among them the Templemores, who were wintering there for the health of their youngest daughter, and she would probably not be in London until spring. Madeline felt her absence greatly; there was more than the ordinary interest and good feeling of a great lady for a *protegé* between them; while she was in London Madeline always felt that sense of "backing up" which is such a stay to moral courage. Besides, her mysterious knowledge of the deceased violinist and ex-captain never left Madeline's memory, and she always looked for the long-promised revelation of their acquaintanceship.

October had now nearly reached its close. It had been a month of glorious weather; once the invalid had been able to go out and taste the fresh air she had improved rapidly.

At last Madeline was summoned to resume her lessons in a family where she taught both French and singing; and a few days after, a note from her friend and patron, the German music-master, informed her he had some junior pupils for her in the neighbourhood of her residence, and she gradually slid back into her old life and business once more. Yet she was less light-hearted than formerly; the memory of Hugh Elliott—the forgiving affection that so heartily promised to befriend her, though she wounded him, would ever and anon rise before her mind's eye with a painful, uneasy sense of some good irretrievably lost. And they missed his visits, the two partners—missed them socially—though they had ceased to mention his name, for he never came again after the evening on which he left the letter with Miss Foster. So autumn deepened into winter.

Mr. John Redman was a fair specimen of the middle-class Englishman: good-natured, where good nature did not interfere with his own comfort or interest, full of prejudice, but not without a certain sense of justice; this had originally been exercised on behalf of his niece, and feeling a little proud of his conduct towards her had given his mind a friendly leaning. He, like Englishmen in general, had a sincere respect for honest, hard-working independence, especially in a woman, and though by no means clear as to Miss Foster's means of support, she had risen many degrees in his estimation since she left his mother's service.

Now that Madeline and her partner had not only lived without asking alms for nine whole months, but come through a severe trial of sickness without any application for aid, he began to think they were very respectable individuals. In former days he might probably have made Madeline a present on the strength of his convictions, but under existing circumstances regard for the interests of his infant son, and a wholesome dread of Mrs. John, who disapproved on principle of the outlay of money, except on herself, forbade the rash act.

Mrs. John, however, was very friendly towards Madeline and Miss Foster. So as soon as that lady was well enough, Mr. and Mrs. John Redman invited them to dinner, and "took the opportunity" to quote Mrs. Redman (as if some difficulty attended it) of asking Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Downing to meet them. In fact, Mr. John doubted if Mrs. Downing was a sufficiently elegant and important person to be admitted to those more costly and ceremonious entertainments, where the keen eye of the fashionable Mrs. Blyth, or the aristocratic eye-glass of the honourable director, might detect deficiencies.

Miss Foster and Madeline were quite willing to go; the first because she never could forget her old Abingdon Villa views of Mr. John's grandeur and importance, and therefore felt notice from that quarter as most flattering; and Madeline, though always bored by her aunt, because she had always cherished a feeling of gratitude to Mr. John for the faint friendliness he had shown in those bitter days, the memory of which made her shudder.

It was a "friendly dinner," as a repast without *entrées*, or an attendant greengrocer, is justly termed, in contradistinction to the grandeur of an entertainment when these ceremonies, in addition to the removal of the loose covers, are observed.

Miss Foster and Madeline wore their morning-dresses, and availed themselves of the "cheap and nasty" convenience of an omnibus. They found Jessie already arrived, but Mr. Downing was to accompany their host from the City. She looked very pretty and lady-like in a well-made black silk, and white lace collar and sleeves, and kneeling on the carpet to play with Mrs.

John's little boy, who began to creep about. Mrs. John herself was magnificent in a scarlet French merino, much braided with black, and a Zouave jacket.

"Glad to see you out again, Miss Foster. I declare you are looking better than before you were ill, and Madeline, you are looking worse. Mr. Redman has not come in yet."

Mrs. Downing was truly pleased to see Madeline, especially as she felt her to be a sort of defence against Mrs. Redman's rather overpowering finery, for Jessie felt Mrs. John to be quite a personage of rank and fashion. They had not, however, exchanged many words, before a loud ring, and the trampling of several pairs of boots, announced the arrival of the host; almost immediately Mr. John entered, exclaiming, "Here, my dear, I have brought another friend to see you, Mr. Elliott." And enter Hugh Elliott, followed by Mr. Downing.

"I am sure I am delighted to see him," said Mrs. John, offering her hand in her jolliest style (she piqued herself on fascinating at first sight), and she had heard of Mr. Elliott as a man of sufficient mark to make his name a desirable addition to the board of the I. C. S. Company.

And Madeline! At first, how she wished the floor would open and let her down to temporary companionship with the cook! Then she rallied slightly, and felt angry with Elliott for putting them to the embarrassment of meeting. He was looking dark and ill, and when his eyes encountered Madeline's his cheek flushed, and a look of pain passed over his face, which went to her heart. Mrs. John attributed his emotion to the overpowering effect of her appearance, and took him into favour at once; then he greeted Miss Foster with much cordiality, and just touched Madeline's hand.

"Oh, ah! Yes, to be sure," said Mr. John, vaguely, "You are some sort of a cousin to Miss Foster?"

"Yes; a near relation," returned Elliott, kindly. Whereupon Miss Foster rose a thousand per cent. at once.

At dinner, Madeline sat between her uncle and Mr. Downing, and Mrs. John showered smiles and small flatteries on Hugh Elliott, who was very quiet and grave. Yet Madeline could not help observing the immense superiority he possessed over his friends. Hugh might not be polished, but there was an unaffected manliness, a sort of broad, sturdy simplicity about him, that lent him dignity, when compared with Mr. John's would-be lordliness, and Mr. Downing's sharp-set assumption. His long, thin, muscular brown hands attracted Madeline's eye, as they often did, for they had much character, and she thought how much patient labour they expressed, and how hard it was that the one bit of love and sunshine he strove to win was denied him.

"And how generous he is," she continued to think. "He cared as much to befriend me after he knew he could be nothing to me as before." Involuntarily she felt that had he been Dudley Ashurst, he would either never have spoken to her of love, or have taken her in the face of the world. "Yet I do not know," whispered her heart, pleading for the old love, "the influence of rank, of social training is so strong." From her musing with down-cast eyes she was roused by the name of "Delille, that impudent French fellow," pronounced rather indignantly by her uncle.

"I by no means approve of him as an agent," continued Mr. Redman. Madeline trembled, she knew what would ensue. "He is sharp and suggestive, decidedly suggestive, but his schemes are so wild; good ideas here and there, but quite mad on some points. I shall never forget his audacity, coming to me to give little Madeline here a marriage portion, indeed! to enable him to provide a proper establishment! What do you think of that?" And Mr. John paused in virtuous indignation. Madeline turned pale with vexation, and Hugh Elliott looked at her for a moment with an expression of sad surprise. She did not know what to do or say; it would be too, too bad, if he thought for a moment that she had preferred the flashy Frenchman; and yet her good taste and good feeling would not permit her speaking disrespectfully or slightingly of any one who had professed a liking for her. She, therefore, said, "French ways and French ideas are very different from ours on these points."

"Very, indeed," returned Mr. Downing, with a sort of echo of Mr. John's tone, "and then the Frenchmen are such mercenary brutes."

"Shocking!" agreed Mrs. John, "would never think of marrying except for money." Madeline could not hold her tongue any longer: "I fancy the principal difference between an English and a Frenchman is, one acts silently on his motives, the other avows them."

"I thought you would take Mounseer's part," said Mr. Downing, laughing, "Miss Digby is quite a Frenchwoman." Madeline felt, with unspeakable annoyance, that Hugh Elliott's eyes were upon her.

And now Miss Foster struck in to complete her confusion,—"I'm sure Madeline was quite vexed and surprised, the evening she got his letter—let me see—quite six months ago, and when she read it to Lady Rawson and me——"

"Oh! law," cried Mrs. John, interrupting her, "what fun! I never heard of the letter before; why Madeline, what a sly puss you are to have kept it so quiet." Poor Miss Foster saw she had made a mistake; she had quite forgotten that Madeline had never mentioned the letter.

"What, had he the impudence to write to you, after my giving him a piece of my mind?" cried Mr. John.

"It was a mistake," said Madeline, indulgently, determined not to turn against poor M. Delille, "but it was one I had no right to betray."

"Bravo!" said Mr. Downing, who was only too glad if he could tease Madeline. "Come, Mr. Redman, the young lady evidently takes the Frenchman's part; if you would be just obliging enough to bestow a small fortune on the happy pair, we might sing—'Haste to the Wedding.'"

Madeline could have willingly seen Mr. Downing temporarily choked; yet she knew how any display of temper would give the game to her adversary; so she tried, and not unsuccessfully, to laugh as if much amused, but she changed colour, and to her surprise, Hugh Elliott, who had sat a silent listener, came to her relief,—"Well, I do not see what else Miss Digby could do but just be silent about the letter; I do not fancy she is a sort of girl to hold up a poor devil to ridicule, because he mistook his wishes for hopes."

"There, Madeline, you have found a champion," said her friend Jessie.

"To whom I am proportionably grateful," returned Madeline, laughing lightly, yet sending a glance of meaning to Elliott, which made his heart beat, and yet filled him with pain: true, he had come to her rescue, but how did he know that some latent tenderness for this wretched foreigner was not at the bottom of her refusal of himself.

"How did we come to employ this Delille?" asked Mr. Downing, with a magnificent air,—he had visibly increased in importance since his connection with the I. C. S. Company, and laid down the law in a way that was instructive to observe.

"Well, he is a friend of O'Keefe's, and O'Keefe led us to believe that he was one of the first engineers in the French service, and made us fix him at a far higher salary than he is worth; indeed, Shuttlecock was only saying to me yesterday, that he had a nephew much better suited to the appointment."

"Don't you mind the general, he and Joblings are trying hard to split up the board into two parties; now, if we could get one or two sensible men like Mr. Elliott here, on the direction," &c., &c.: and "shop" being the order of the conversation, Mrs. Redman gave the signal for the ladies' retirement sooner than usual, as there was evidently no chance of her securing that amount of admiration and attention which was necessary.

The dinner had not been successful; Madeline was pre-occupied; Mr. Downing too presumptuously dictatorial; Mrs. Downing too mousey; and as to Mr. Elliott, he was a monster of

insensibility. After dinner was not much better; the gentlemen sat too long: Madeline sang when she was asked, but was spiritless, and had but one moment of vivid feeling, when Mr. Elliott came over to the piano, and said in a low voice, "I had not the least expectation of meeting you, or believe me, I would not have come; I am going now, good-night:" he took her hand for a moment. Madeline could have found it in her heart to exclaim—"Stay, have patience with me," but a sense of regret, of painful obligation, of sympathy and regard, seemed to choke her: so Hugh Elliott went on his way, and she saw him no more for many days.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DARK, foggy, November afternoon was fast drawing a damp curtain of mist over the great city, and especially over Sutherland Street, Strand, as it debouched upon the river; the gas-jets illuminating No. 13, Messrs. Harridge and Blyth's office, had been lit full two hours before their ordinary time; the board of directors of the International and Colonial Iron Ship-building Company (Limited) had risen after a prolonged and somewhat stormy *séance* (the temporary offices of the Company were at No. 13), and nearly all had dispersed to their divers destinations. Mr. John Redman and Mr. O'Keefe however remained, discussing one or two points over a bright fire in Mr. Blyth's snug private office. That gentleman was writing busily to catch the post, and paid no attention to them at first, but having fastened his last envelope, and confided his lucubrations to a clerk, he stood up and joined them.

"Joblings is really a drag on the concern," Mr. John was saying,—"what profits can we hope to make if we will not take the slightest risk?"

"Just so; faith, you are right," said O'Keefe, planting a huge muddy boot on one hob, and thrusting his left hand well out of his coat sleeve, the better to rumple his red hair, "He's a narrow-minded naygur."

"I don't know," said Mr. Blyth, sharply, "I think him a prudent steady fellow—an acquisition to the board."

"Well, there's some truth in that," agreed The O'Keefe, who was remarkably open to conviction. "But what do you think, Redman," he continued, "I had a fire and fury letter from that quare fellow, Delille, only to-day; he says he has entered into a speculation that will magnificently enrich him in three months, when he will return to espouse that angel of goodness and beauty, Mademoiselle Digby."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Blyth, in rather a peculiar tone.

"He is a —— fool," ejaculated Mr. Redman.

"Well, he is and he isn't, the crature," said O'Keefe, compassionately.

"Pray, wasn't Miss Digby's father's name Arthur?" asked Mr. Blyth, who was rummaging amongst some papers.

"I really do not know; I believe so; why?" said Mr. John.

"Because—ah! here it is; a good deal depends on it. Here is a little abstract of her case, which I drew out at the time you employed me to look her up at Thames End. I frequently made notes of peculiar cases. Yes, father's name 'Arthur Digby, late of the 31st Light Dragoons.' Well, Mr. Redman, I fancy your niece is going to turn out an heiress."

"Is it joking you are?" cried O'Keefe.

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. John.

Mr. Blyth's answer was to take up a *Times* of four or five days before, a good deal doubled up, and pointing to an advertisement marked by a cross in red ink, Mr. Redman with a puzzled air read as follows: "General Edward Digby, formerly of the 101st Royal Irish Carbineers, and also of Killycoolan, Ireland, deceased: the next of kin is requested to communicate with W. S. Payne, solicitor, Old Jewry."

"Well?" said Mr. John interrogatively, looking at his friend.

"Well," echoed Mr. Blyth, "I mean to say, that next of kin is your niece."

"Hoorah!" cried O'Keefe, "the darlin'! I am as glad as if I came into a fortune meself."

"But how do you make it out?" asked Mr. John Redman, still bewildered.

"Come, I will tell you the whole story," said the attorney, with benevolence. "Payne is an old friend of mine, and long ago he mentioned a queer client of his, a General Digby, a man near eighty, the greatest old miser and vagabond in existence—did not give himself proper food, or clothes, or shelter. Payne was ashamed to have him coming to the office, but he was rich, he lent money at high interest and was awfully keen in extracting the uttermost farthing: as to Payne's bills, the battles over them were tremendous, still the old fellow stuck to Payne; he used to say, 'they are all as bad as you are, and I know *your* doubles.' He lived over Kennington way, and had a lot of houses let in rooms, wretched places, but latterly he realized a good deal and placed his money in mortgages and railway debentures. *We* got our promotion money from him. Well, one day, more than four years ago, Payne was complaining to me of the bother he had with this old miser, and how he could not get him to make a will (I think Payne expected to be remembered) or to look up any of his relations. 'Now,' said Payne to me, 'he has taken it into his head that he saw a girl he would like to find out about—he

met her in a Kennington omnibus—she told him her name was Madeline Digby.' I pricked up my ears at this, but held my tongue, and when I inquired next time, the general had forbidden Payne to advertise or make any inquiries about the girl. 'Who knows what army of poor relations I might bring down on myself,' he said. Since I met Miss Digby at your house last spring I have made a few inquiries of Payne, and found the old gentleman had an elder brother Tom, who was married to a Blake of Ballyshanahan. ("I know them well!" ejaculated O'Keefe in a parenthesis.) He left two sons: the eldest was killed in a duel in Germany, the second, Arthur, went into the army and was lost sight of; it was supposed he died unmarried in America. Now this man was the father of your niece, Mr. Redman."

"God bless my soul!" said that gentleman much surprised, having listened with breathless attention to Mr. Blyth's narrative.

"It's as plain as the nose on your face! How much may the property be worth, sir?" shouted O'Keefe.

"I cannot exactly say. I have not as yet communicated with Mr. Payne. I thought it right first to mention the matter to you, Mr. Redman, as you are Miss Digby's nearest relation; with your sanction I shall take the necessary steps, and should litigation ensue, we shall carefully guard the charming minor's (she is not of age, eh?) interest."

"Litigation!" cried Mr. Redman, a little alarmed at the portentous word. "I hope not! It is foolish to throw away good money after bad."

"Still fifty or sixty thousand pounds are worth trying for, eh, Redman?" said Mr. Blyth dryly, "besides, no man in his senses would attempt to set up a case against her, except illegitimacy. By the way, who has her papers, I mean the packet I looked at nearly five years ago?"

"I fancy my mother," replied Mr. Redman, half stupefied at the immense change impending, while O'Keefe, profoundly interested in his fair young countrywoman's fortunes, muttered exultingly:

"Fifty or sixty thousand pounds! Oh Lord! More power to ye!—ye dark-eyed darlin'."

"Well, the sooner we get them," said Mr. Blyth, speaking of the papers, "the better, and with all my proofs in hand I shall call upon Payne. You may be sure there are half-a-dozen claimants already."

"I thought the old general had no relations," remarked Mr. Redman.

"An advertisement of this kind," said the attorney, tapping the paper, "developes kindred to an extraordinary extent. However, it's getting late, and I must go homewards; endeavour to get me

all the papers bearing on the subject of Miss Digby's parentage, if possible to-morrow, and I will draw up a short statement for Payne's consideration. By the way, who was the old lady she was with in Paris?"

"Oh! I can't remember the name, but perhaps my mother has not destroyed the letter she wrote about Madeline Digby. I fancy she mentioned in it one of the names you repeated just now—Bally something."

"Ballyshanahan?" asked Mr. Blyth.

"Yes, something like that. But I'll go straight up to my mother's to-night and see what I can get from her. This is a most extraordinary affair, really, but there cannot be a better little girl than my niece!"

Ah! from henceforth Madeline would be nicce, and granddaughter, and cousin, and bone of their bone to the Redman faction, if only this dazzling vision be realised.

"Do," said the attorney, gathering his papers together, locking his desk, and generally preparing for departure. "The less time lost the better in an affair of this kind."

So Mr. John Redman found himself obliged to say good evening and descend into the street, instead of remaining to relieve his mind by questioning and wondering conjectures as he would like to have done.

O'Keefe accompanied him. "Come into my place (it's close by) and take some soda-water with a sketch of brandy in it," said the hospitable Milesian, who was especially national under excitement. "A turn of this kind is apt to upset the stomach."

"Nonsense," returned Mr. John, a little bluffly; "much obliged to you all the same; but I think a turn of *this* kind raises the spirits, and sharpens the appetite, so I'll go off to my dinner."

"And who is to tell that chyarming niece of yours the good luck that is come to her?"

"Oh, I don't know!—it's time enough, I'll lay any money my wife will be with her as soon as she's had her breakfast to-morrow."

"Faith, I'll go meself," said O'Keefe, with an audacious swagger; "ain't I her next of kin, after yourself?"

"You!—how?" asked Mr. John, with indignant scorn.

"Didn't I explain it to ye at your elegant little dinner last March! Look here, now," and stopping at the corner of Sutherland Street and the Strand, O'Keefe laid hold of Mr. Redman's lapel with one hand, and enforced the points of his discourse by energetic gestures with the other, to the edification of the passers by. "My great grandfather, Miles O'Keefe of Rawcrawn, married a Blake of Ballyshanahan; well, his second son, Hyacinth O'Keefe, married a sister of Costello of Ballybough, who had the

honour of being grandmother to your humble servant; that very Costello married a Digby—I'm not sure whether of Killycoolan or Loughmacrew, no matter, they are the one family—so that makes a double relationship; don't you see?"

"No, I don't!" said Mr. John, rather testily. "How the deuce can this Mr. Costello be your grandmother I'd like to know?—Here! hansom!—I must say good evening; Mrs. Redman will be waiting dinner!"

The O'Keefe nodded to Mr. Redman, as he drove off, but remained standing where he had left him. Slowly he introduced the fore-finger of his left hand under the rim of his hat, tilting it considerably on one side, till it assumed a thoroughly "jolly dog" aspect, and then gently rubbing the roots of his abundant hair, he reflected: "Costello my grandmother! God help your muddle-head! It's wonderful how niggardly nature has been to these English in the matter of brains; deuce a thing they can do but make money, tho' faith! that same is a grand compensation. Any how, I'll go see Miss Digby; she'll understand that, at all events, we are nearly connected. Let me see, where is she to be found? Kent Terrace, somewhere. Here, cabby! go to Kent Terrace; in a jiffey, mind ye!"

"Kent Terrace, New Road, sir?"

"That's it, me boy! I knew it was somewhere west; shove along!"

It was nearly half-past seven o'clock before the energetic O'Keefe surmounted the difficulty of searching for a dweller in apartments without knowing the number, or the name of the landlady. But the great "O'" was not easily daunted, he knocked or rung at every door till he found Madeline's abode. She was at the piano; she took refuge from her thoughts in music more frequently of late; for, from some unexplained cause, a sombre hue always coloured her musings; she looked forward less, and was more wearied with her work than of old.

Always tender and lovingly patient with Miss Foster, and her occasionally little teazing ways (for a woman of the one calibre *must* at times be teazed by a woman of the other), she was more silent and less expansive than she used to be; in short, she was passing through one of those transitions that come to the mental as well as to the physical constitution. And she was dull: she missed Lady Rawson's cheerful, wholesome strength, she missed the society she used to enjoy at her house, and that of some of her pupils; and she missed the bracing effect of her intellectual conflicts with Hugh Elliott; so she sat down to the piano more frequently, and played dreamily. Miss Foster, now quite herself again, was doing some needlework by the light of a moderator lamp, shaded with pink cut paper, when once more "Hemma"

appeared with a card and the question, "Shall the gentleman come up?"

"The O'Keefe; what can he want?" said Madeline, with languid curiosity. "You will be amused with him, aunty. Yes, ask him to walk up, Emma."

Soon a ponderous, creaking step was heard, and the great "O'" entered, beaming all over his round, joyous face, like an animated sign of the "Sun in splendour."

"Miss Digby, your most obedient; I'm proud and happy to pay me respects to you—especially when I'm the bearer of pleasing intelligence."

"Very happy to see you, Mr. O'Keefe; let me present you to my friend, Miss Foster."

The O'Keefe made a huge bow, and laying aside his hat, accepted the chair which Madeline indicated, and which gave audible indication of his weight.

"What can he want?" she thought, brightening up under the excitement of curiosity.

"Ahem!" said O'Keefe, unbuttoning his overcoat, and rumpling his hair. "I have done meself the honour of calling upon you, because as your nearest of kin on the father's side at present in town (as I think I explained to you at Mrs. Redman's charming little pawrty last spring), it is my duty, as well as a pleasure, to inform you of some important facts that have just come to my knowledge; ahem!"

O'Keefe looked almost fierce in his attempt to assume a dignified and impressive aspect.

"You are very good," said Madeline gently, imagining he paused for a reply.

"No, I'm not," returned O'Keefe, fairly bursting with his subject, "but I expect *you* are; and, I'm sure, when I look at ye, and see the stamp of a noble race in your air and bearing! and the stamp of a noble spirit on your face, and in them diamond eyes! and think of a Digby, and a beautiful, elegant creature like yourself, living up two pair of stairs, with a slut of a servant to wait on ye, or, much more likely, keep you waiting, me blood would boil, if it didn't turn cold in me veins! Well, me business here this evening" (a thump of his shut hand on the table), "is to tell you that's all over now! and you're one of our greatest heiresses! Your grand-uncle, General Digby, has been good enough to die and leave you between sixty and seventy thousand pounds, no less!" a short side nod of the head and semi-wink, indescribably knowing, formed a rather undignified termination to this eloquent outburst.

Madeline drew a little nearer to Miss Foster, fairly frightened, for she thought the great "O'" must either be mad or intoxicated.

"Really, Mr. O'Keefe, I cannot understand; *who* did you say had left me a fortune?"

"Your uncle. I mean your father's uncle; that is, he didn't exactly leave it. He left no will; but you are uncontrovertibly the next of kin. We have overwhelming proof."

"Oh!" said Madeline, "if it is anything to be proved in law I will never get it, so I had better not think about it, eh, Mr. O'Keefe?"

She was not in the least disturbed, for his words were to her but idle tales, some extraordinary delusion of his vivid imagination.

"Come now, I'll tell you the whole ins and outs of the story, and you shall judge for yourself," resumed O'Keefe, releasing his coat tails (which he had sat down upon) by a series of jerks and oscillations, which threatened destruction to the much-enduring chair. "Blyth (you know Blyth?), not a stupid fellow for an Englishman, he says to Redman an meself this afternoon (we were having a little chat after the board at Blyth's office), 'Look at this,' says he; 'maybe that's some relation of your niece.' With that he handed us a *Times* three or four days old, with an advertisement in it for the next of kin of General Digby, late of some regiment, and of Killycoolan, Ireland. I pricked up me ears at this, and went into the whole pedigree, proving beyond a doubt that he was your late father's uncle, consequently that you were the sole heiress. Redman got fearfully excited, and Blyth quite lost his head (for he happened to know the old fellow's attorney, and says he was a millionaire—a millionaire, faith!) So, says I, keep yourselves cool, for God's sake. Collect all the authentic documents you can, and we'll lay them before this Payne (that's the man who advertises); prove our case to demonstration; and put the young lady in possession of her property before a month is out!"

Another thump on the table at this triumphant climax.

"What an extraordinary story," said Madeline, still incredulous, though a little moved by the fact that two such common-sense men as uncle John and Mr. Blyth should be mixed up in it.

"Strange, but true," ejaculated O'Keefe. "Now, lowering his voice mysteriously, "I foresee that fellow Blyth will be trying to get the management of your property into his own hands; and though I'm sure a more upright man never walked, the chances are he'll make ducks and drakes of it. And your uncle, a most superior fellow! he'll be for curbing you right and left! Now I know a first-rate man, *and* a countryman, just starting in London on his own account, Cornelius Doolan. He'd manage your business first-rate. And as for meself"—a magnificent wave of the hand—"I'm sure I needn't say I am your most devoted, and place meself entirely at your service."

He paused, and wiped his brow with a red and yellow pocket-handkerchief.

"Really, Mr. O'Keefe," said Madeline, quietly, and smiling, finding her kinsman's eloquence irresistibly amusing, "it sounds like a fairy tale. I trust the morning will not prove it to be but the baseless fabric of a dream."

"You don't believe me?" cried O'Keefe, indignantly.

"Pray do not be offended," exclaimed the trembling Miss Foster.

"Well, now! what do you think of this?" said O'Keefe. "Do you ever remember meeting a shabby old fellow, that looked like a miser, in an omnibus?"

"In an omnibus?" repeated Madeline, musingly. "Yes! many."

"Ay! but this one asked you your name."

"I do, I do!" cried Madeline, a sudden flash of memory beaming in upon her, and placing that first journey in a London omnibus clear before her eyes. "It was more than four years ago, near Kennington Gate."

"The same," said O'Keefe, solemnly. "That old gentleman was your grand-uncle, the late General Digby; and he was struck with you and your name, mentioned the *rencontre* to his solicitor, Payne, who mentioned it to Blyth, and thus he got hold of the first link of the chain," concluded O'Keefe pompously, quite forgetting the different version of the story he had told a few minutes before.

"Well, Mr. O'Keefe," said Madeline, feeling indistinctly called upon to say something, "I am much obliged to you for the kind interest you have shown in me; and however this strange affair may terminate, I shall not forget your friendliness."

"Yes, I am sure you are very good," said Miss Foster, dying to get rid of him.

"Faith!" cried O'Keefe, laughing, "you don't believe a word I've been saying. Well, no matter. Remember, *I* was the first to bring you the good news. I must tell me young friend Delille the great event. Ah! Miss Digby, ye riddled that poor fellow. If ever a crature went away broken-hearted, Delille was the man. How often he has implored me for tidings of his *belle ange d'innocence et de beauté!*"

"What a shame for you to neglect his commission," said Madeline, laughing gaily, "for I can tell him you never came to inquire after me."

"Ah, then! maybe I had the sense to keep myself out of harm's way," returned O'Keefe, with such an air of devoted admiration that Madeline burst into a hearty and undisguised fit of laughter.

"Then having done my errand I shall retire" said O'Keefe, ris

ing with dignity. "You have my card, a line to that address will always find me ready, ay, ready! to do the impossible in your service! Miss Foster, I am proud of the honour of your acquaintance. Miss Digby, your most obedient!" And The O'Keefe strode away highly satisfied with his own performance.

"What an extraordinary person, dear," exclaimed Miss Foster, as soon as he was out of hearing. "Surely he cannot be a relative of yours?"

"I am sure I do not know," said Madeline, still laughing. "If he likes to think and say so, I have no objection."

"But what do you think of his strange story?"

"I don't know what to say."

"If Mr. John believes it there must be some sense in it."

"Yes, if he does! But why did he not come and tell me himself, instead of leaving this strange, droll, incomprehensible man to make such an announcement. That alone throws doubt upon the matter in my opinion. Dearest aunty, let us try not to think of it, at any rate not to-night. It would be dreadful to believe such a fairy tale and be disappointed. If there be any truth in it I shall hear from uncle John to-morrow; if not, we have still the prospect of a few months' peaceful existence before us; let us be content with that."

But in spite of her reasoning and resolution Madeline's fancy could not help wandering to the golden vision held up to it. Sixty or seventy thousand pounds! She could not at all realise an idea of such magnitude. But what she *did* realise was the delight of daring to think of next week, next month, next quarter, without that sinking of the heart, that quiver in the region of the pocket, so trying both to nerve and temper. But turn from the subject as she might, she could not silence Miss Foster, who would break out, after short intervals of enforced silence, with exclamations:

"Well, Madeline, suppose this extraordinary story is true, where would you live? I suppose you would take a house and furnish it?"

"Most probably," returned Madeline, laughing, "or—"

"Madeline, I have been thinking what *will* Mrs. Redman say!"

"Very likely that she never knew my worth before, that is, if the tale prove true."

At last Madeline persuaded her faithful friend and ally to go to bed—where both of them dreamed dreams, and saw visions, alternately depressing and delightful.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BREAKFAST was over next morning, and Madeline had her bonnet on ready to start on her morning's avocations a little earlier than usual, intending to do some shopping on the way, when the door of their sitting-room was flung hastily open, and—enter Mrs. John Redman, in her Sunday bonnet and cloak, followed by her husband, looking overwhelmed with his own importance.

"Well!" cried Mrs. John, who was in a radiant condition, seizing Madeline by both her hands. "Was there ever such a funny business! Why, child, you'll be one of the greatest catches going! Sixty thousand pounds! I could not let your uncle come up without me. I was always so much interested in you, you know, and I'm sure none of your friends can rejoice more truly at your good fortune than I do! What on earth will Mrs. Redman say? But did O'Keefe really come up and tell you last night! It was like his impudence!"

"Come, come!" said uncle John, with more of his old superiority than usual. (The accession of wealth and importance to a niece threw additional lustre even over Mr. John.) "We must not lose time. What did O'Keefe tell you?—or did he tell you anything?"

"Yes," said Madeline, extricating her hands from Mrs. John, and giving her a chair. "He told me an extraordinary tale about an old General Digby dying and leaving a quantity of money, and that I am to inherit it. But indeed I did not believe him."

"There is some truth in it, however," returned her uncle. "And I went off last night, directly after dinner, and got the certificate of your father and mother's marriage, and your baptism, and your father's letter to my mother, but I should like something more, some proof that he had actually been in the regiment in which this old man's nephew was said to have been. Have you any documents which could throw light on this point?"

"I do not think I have," returned Madeline, still calm, yet beginning to experience a strange sensation of uneasy hope. "I have his picture—stay, it is in uniform—*that* may throw some light on the subject. I suppose every regiment has its own uniform."

"Oh! they change, they change," said Uncle John, disparagingly. "Now, I will just tell you the whole case, and then you will see whether there are any papers or documents in your possession bearing upon it." And Uncle John, in a few words, recapitulated Mr. Blyth's history, disregarding Mrs. John's audible asides to Miss Foster, and her *naïve* wonderings—"If Madeline really gets all this money, what will she do with you?"

Madeline of course listened with all her ears. "I know but one letter amongst the few old ones which I found my father had

always kept, and I have still by me," she said. "It is one from my mother, written before they were married. In it she speaks of the sudden shock he must have received by the death of his brother under such distressing and dreadful circumstances, and also regrets that the family estate should be seized by creditors, as it will add to the obstacles to their union.

"And you think it alludes to his brother who was killed in Germany?"

"I think so—the date will tell."

"Let me have both the letter and the picture. I will give them to Blyth to-day; he will, I believe, call on Payne this afternoon, and I shall know the result of the interview to-morrow."

"And let me know, pray," cried Madeline, "for as you may suppose, though I can scarce believe it, I am a little anxious."

"Well, I dare say you are, and you shall have a line from me, or—" suddenly remembering that his niece was no longer an insignificant item—"I will call. Just get me the picture and letter, and I will go."

Madeline left the room to bring her treasures forth to light. She sighed as she reverently turned over the old yellow papers with faded writing; typical of the life and love there recorded, now past and forgotten! She felt a species of reluctance to part with this memento of the mother she loved without having known!

Meantime, Mr. John put his hands behind his back, and his back opposite the fire, and whistled meditatively, in deep thought. And Mrs. John continued her conjectures.

"I wonder where she'll live, and who she'll live with! Wasn't it fortunate she did not marry that Sam Moorcroft? She ought to marry a man of rank now! Indeed, I always said—and you'll bear me out in it, John—that she was an ornament to any room. I wonder what Mrs. Blyth thinks! I suppose Blyth tells her everything."

Here Madeline entered with he miniature in a faded, much-rubbed, red-morocco case, and the letter open in her hand.

"Let me look, Madeline," cried Mrs. John, seizing the miniature: "dear me! now really, he was a very handsome man—eyes like yours, Madeline; but dark hair. In the dragoons, I see!"

"You will take care of them, and return them to me," said Madeline, addressing her uncle.

"Certainly, certainly," returned that gentleman: and placing both the letter and the picture in his pocket, he bid his niece and Miss Foster good morning.

Mrs. John, however, stayed for nearly an hour after him, till she talked herself hoarse, and almost exhausted even Madeline's large stock of patience. She offered advice and suggestions on all possible topics—from dress and household management; the

weeding of Madeline's acquaintance; up to the choice of a husband, and the disposal of Miss Foster. She, with much effusion, offered Madeline a home under her maternal care; "for, indeed, your own uncle's house is the most proper place for you."

"Thank you," said Madeline, rather drily, as she drew on her gloves. "Miss Foster and I have got on so well hitherto, that I do not think we shall give up our partnership, even if this 'golden legend' be realised. Eh, aunty! you can contrive to bear with my company a little longer?" and she gave her a hearty kiss, for she fancied she could see something like depression and uneasiness steal over her friend's countenance, while Mrs. John was settling all things so volubly, and to her own satisfaction.

"My dear, you must just do whatever is best for you in this—this awful change," returned Miss Foster, tremulously.

Madeline laughed.

"I must say good morning," she continued to Mrs. John, who looked contemptuous disapproval at this testimony of regard to her companion.

"Where are you off to now?" asked Mrs. John, a little annoyed at the *séance* being broken up.

"To my pupils, in Oxford Square," replied Madeline, "and I fear I am late."

"Law, my dear, how can you! don't you feel it disgusting?" cried Mrs. John, with lofty sympathy.

"It would be far more disgusting to find myself next week without either pupils or fortune, perhaps," returned Madeline, "so adieu—*au revoir!*"

"Well! that is the most extraordinary girl—I may say the most unsatisfactory girl—I ever met," said Mrs. John, emphatically. "She just seems to care as little about her chance of getting a princely fortune, as if my husband had not picked her out of the mire! not—" continued Mrs. John, checking herself, and certain, according to her low psychological code, that Miss Foster was ready to pounce on any word or token whereby she might introduce the point of the wedge "discord" between Madeline and her natural protectors—"not that I wasn't always foolish about her; she is such a nice creature; but it *is* aggravating to see her take this great news so coolly."

"Why, you see," urged Miss Foster in extenuation, "she does not half believe it, and as everything is uncertain as yet, it is better she should."

"Well, I am certain it's all right," said Mrs. John, "and if it is not, I will be ready to tear that meddlesome Blyth's eyes out. Now I'll just go and call on grandma. Law, what a life that Miss Sharp does lead her! You see what it is to have a little spirit, Miss Foster," concluded Mrs. John, in a morally approving tone, as if

the strength to torment and domineer over one's fellow-creatures was a proud possession.

Mrs. John's departure was a great relief; and yet poor Miss Foster scarce knew how to pass the time—to endure its leaden slowness until Madeline's return.

She longed to see that gentle face, those soft dark eyes that always looked so kind, so true, so stedfast. She felt no apprehension that Madeline, whom she knew so well (so far as she could comprehend her), would throw her off; but there must be a terrible *bouleversement* in consequence of such a change, and she did long to hear Madeline's voice.

And at last she came, looking a little weary and very grave. She unrolled and placed her music in the stand, untied and removed her bonnet without any word, only greeting Miss Foster by a smile and a pressure of the hand; then she put back her hair behind her ears, and said, "It is all so bewildering, dear aunty: I try not to think of it, and yet I can think of nothing else. I hope they will soon put me out of pain, or I fear I shall deteriorate mentally and morally. Ah! if it is a reality, this fortune, why, why did it not come a few months sooner? all would have been so different!"

"Better late than never," returned Miss Foster, with an attempt to be cheerful; but Madeline did not hear her: she rested her clasped hands on her knee, and was lost in thought; one or two large tears trembled for a moment on her long lashes, and then rolled slowly over, as if loth to stain so fair, so young a cheek with their sad traces.

"My dearest Madeline," cried Miss Foster, her sympathy up and awake in a moment, "don't cry; it's very trying, but don't cry."

"You make me feel how silly I am," returned Madeline, rousing herself; "if my aunt, the countess, was alive now, what a struggle I should have for an independent existence. If anything would have tempted her to visit this barbarous capital, it would have been to appropriate and administer my fortune."

"Dear me! you don't say so," said Miss Foster, much shocked.

"Oh! I didn't mean that," returned Madeline, smiling, and answering her suspicions rather than her words, "Madame de Fontarce would have done her very best for me; but then I would not have been permitted to meddle—good heavens!—with such material as fifty or sixty thousand pounds. What would not the countess have done? Transformed me into a princess at least. I should not have liked to have been poor Mons. Delille in her way, if she had succeeded in marrying him to me."

"Do you know I feel very much for that poor young man," said Miss Foster, pensively.

"Do you?" said Madeline, with culpable indifference, her

thoughts far away. "And then," she continued, "Madame de Fontarce would have done it all so pleasantly, and tenderly, and elegantly, that it would be like conferring a favour. Poor thing! she was very good to me in her way. But I tell you, dear aunty, liberty is very, very sweet; and I cannot help thinking that, if this wonderful fortune does come to me, how delightful it will be to go away in the bright spring weather from the glare and noise of this great place into some sweet fresh country, where we shall have great cool shady trees, and violets and primroses, and green mossy grass, with big black stones all wet with the spray of some little brook chafing by them; while you, dear aunty, shall get so strong, and lead, oh, such a peaceful life! and I,—what shall I do?—I shall learn to ride on horseback, and send my dear M. Duseautoir a little something *pour les pauvres* every Easter. And, oh! I must find out Kit—poor dear Kit! Fancy the delight of seeing Kit again, aunty. I feel that I *must* kiss him." And Madeline laughed so joyously, with something of the bright infantine mirth which at first contrasted so strangely, in Miss Foster's estimation, with her precocious earnestness. "But I must not let these charming visions delude me," continued Madeline, covering her face with her hands. "I shall wake, I must wake, and find them baseless fabrics.

That evening's post brought a letter from The O'Keefe, informing our heroine that he had informed himself carefully how matters stood; and that, although her claim to the estate, real and personal, of the late General Digby was incontestable, a formidable party was going to contest it, namely, the Earl of Templemore, backed by all the power and wealth of a bloated aristocracy and a venal bar; and that nothing but the courage, skill, tact, and ability, of his young friend Doolan could extricate her from so formidable an opposition; and, therefore, he would bring that ornament of the legal profession, and present him to her on the following day.

"He shall do nothing of the kind," said Madeline, resolutely.

Another letter was brought by a special messenger from Mr. Blyth's office:

"To Miss Digby. (Yourself and the Estate of the late General Digby.)

"DEAR MADAM,

"We this afternoon laid copies of the various documents bearing on your identity, and that of your late father, before Messrs. Payne and Co., who have of course requested time to consider, and also to take counsel's opinion. We understand the only other claimant who possesses any title is the Earl of Tem

plemore. He claims through his grandmother, who was aunt to the late General Digby; but your title is plainly direct.

"We have the honour to be, Madam,

"Your obedient servants,

"HARRIDGE AND BLYTH."

Enclosed was a note in a different hand:

"DEAR MISS DIGBY,

"Accept my sincere congratulations. I have been so hard at work in your affairs, that I have scarce time to send you a line, just to relieve your mind. Your case is perfectly proved; it will still take a little time to complete formalities, and then I hope to see you in possession of nearly three thousand a year. Meantime, if in want of a present supply, I shall be most happy to act as your banker. Mrs. Blyth will take an early opportunity of calling, and will be delighted if she can be of any service to you.

"I am, yours very truly,

"FREDERIC BLYTH."

"Well, *he* believes in my heirship," said Madeline, after reading this note aloud, "and gives the strongest proof of his faith; but no, I shall not put myself under the slightest obligation to him. I have never borrowed any money yet, except——"

She stopped, coloured visibly, while the tears rose to her eyes, and she remained silent.

"Oh no!" cried Miss Foster, hastening to her rescue, knowing perfectly what was in her thoughts, "*that* was given to *me*, and certainly not borrowed, for no one asked for it."

"And how badly off we should have been without it," added Madeline, thoughtfully. "Ah, aunty, how good he was for us! I wonder what he is doing now." Miss Foster ventured no reply to this; so Madeline sat down to her writing-table, as she politely termed a little deal washstand without a basin hole, which she had disguised by throwing a gay cloth over it, and wrote a polite little note to The O'Keefe, declining the services of the accomplished Doolan, and stating that, for the present, she was in the hands of Messrs. Harridge and Blyth. This she despatched by the hands of a special messenger.

It was a distracting period, this interval between poverty and riches; and though Madeline strove to fix her mind on her business, her pupils, her imagination would not rest. It was constantly suggesting pictures grave and gay, while each day had its little event. That following the one just recorded was especially distinguished.

In the afternoon Madeline had sat down to write a long letter to

Lady Rawson, who had written, inquiring kindly about Madeline's affairs, more than ten days previously, when the door was opened slowly, and enter grandmamma Redman in a capacious black velvet bonnet, a velvet mantle, and the perpetual black satin dress. She leant one hand on Miss Sharp's arm, and rested the other heavily on the handle of the door. She seemed rather exhausted, and considerably wheezy. Madeline felt almost stunned by her extreme surprise at such an apparition; but Miss Foster, true to her old habits, sprang forward to assist.

"Dear me, how high up you are to be sure," began Mrs. Redman, with something of her old querulousness, though in a much less acidulated tone than usual; and sinking into a chair which Madeline politely placed for her reception.

"Quite up in the skies," added Miss Sharp, catching up one nostril with a slight disdainful snuffle, as was her habit. She looked as iron-grey and steely as ever, and wore a black stuff dress, a shepherd's plaid shawl, a black and white straw bonnet, trimmed with grey ribbons in the most rigid fashion, while her pepper and salt curls looked like cushion springs, slightly relaxed. "Quite up in the skies," said Miss Sharp.

"But most desirable apartments, nevertheless," replied Miss Foster, gently.

"I hope you are pretty well?" asked Madeline, with the tone of quiet politeness she generally adopted to Mrs. Redman.

"Well, so so; but you are looking better than ever I saw you before. And, really now, you have your place very nice. Quite genteel, I declare. Very much to your credit. And it's your doings, I am pretty sure; for I know Miss Foster of old." And Mrs. Redman stopped to cough.

Miss Sharp gave a short scornful laugh, and sat down almost in Mrs. Redman's pocket.

"Well," recommenced Mrs. Redman, after waiting for her granddaughter to speak, "*this* is an extraordinary piece of luck; who'd have thought it? I am sure when John came in the night before last, wanting your papers, and told me all about it, you might have knocked me down with a feather. I am sure there is no friend so truly rejoiced as myself. And after all, none could take so great an interest in you as I do, having reared, and educated, and cherished you when no one else would take you up, and I have never regretted it! For I will say you are a credit to me!" And the old lady blew her nose.

Madeline's short, proud-looking upper lip curled into a contemptuous smile, of which she was probably unconscious, "You are very good," she said.

"And finding you did not call round yesterday," continued Mrs. Redman, as though her granddaughter and herself had al-

ways been on the most friendly terms; "although I felt far from strong, I sent round to Collins, and ordered a brougham, just to come and see you and talk over matters."

"Did you indeed?" said Madeline, with *naïve* sympathy. "Why did you not wait a day or two, to ascertain really how the affair will turn out, before you incurred the expense and trouble? after all, I may not get the fortune!"

There was not a shade of acerbity in Madeline's tone, and she uttered the words with a gentle smile, but they struck home. Old Mrs. Redman's pale cheek flushed slightly, while Miss Sharp snapped out a "Well, I declare," like a short war note. "There's gratitude," ejaculated Mrs. Redman, yet more in sorrow than in anger; she could not find it in heart to be savage to a sweet young creature, the possible-possessor of sixty thousand pounds; so she continued, in a touching strain, "Who fed, and clothed, and educated you? Where would you be but for me?"

"Quite true," said Madeline, coolly. "You did me good service, and I cost you a large outlay, which if my present hopes are fulfilled, I shall refund, for I *can* repay *you*."

"That is all very fine," retorted Mrs. Redman, growing angry, *i.e.*, beginning to be less certain that Madeline would turn out a great heiress. "But, as you say, it may prove a take-in, and then you will be as badly off as ever, and sorry for the way in which you have spoken to me."

"No," replied Madeline, quietly, "it is because my fortunes are still uncertain, I speak as I do; were they assured, I should have hesitated to speak so; but I do want you to know that I like reality, and that although I readily acknowledge my obligations to you, and wish always to treat you with respect, we must understand that whether I am rich or poor, there can be no tender heart-effusions between *us*. Let us say no more on so unpleasant a topic; but allow me to offer you a glass of wine. I have still a few left of some very curious port, Uncle John was so kind as to send Miss Foster when she was ill."

Old Mrs. Redman gasped; Madeline's cool collected tone took her breath away. It was what *she did not* expect! She thought that, with her coarse adulation and personal praise, she could paint out the dark cold colours in which she had hitherto clothed herself, that Madeline would be all fluttered at the prospect of so golden a destiny; and, beyond this, the old mammon-worshipper was perfectly sincere in the sudden regard she had expressed for her granddaughter. She would always have loved her tenderly had she possessed sixty thousand pounds, or been indifferently well-disposed towards her had she cost her nothing, but a poor relation, and a burden into the bargain, was more than Redman flesh and blood could bear."

All these conditions of mind appeared perfectly natural and normal to Mrs. Redman; and if anything struck her as remarkable, it was her own magnanimity in so quickly forgiving Madeline for her previous poverty!

"Well, I'm sure!" said Miss Sharp.

"My dear Madeline," remonstrated Miss Foster.

"Now hold your tongue, do," said dear grandma, turning on the last speaker from force of habit and the strong necessity of venting her feelings. "Don't you be putting in your talk; as to myself, I know of old there is very little gratitude in you, Madeline Digby; but I am an old woman"—she called it "ooman,"—"and willing to forget and forgive; you'll know better some day. I was going to have a snug little party to tea, and a bit of supper; yourself and Miss Foster, the Comerfords, and Mr. and Mrs. John; but I suppose you are too grand to come."

"Wait for a week or two," said Madeline, good-humouredly, "and then I shall be most happy to accept your hospitality; at present I should feel as if I were obtaining it under false pretences:" and Madeline laughed, joyously and sweetly; it was from sense of drollery more than any revenge that she spoke, and the dismay depicted on her grandmother's face—the tigerish anger on that of Miss Sharp, were too much for her gravity.

"I'm going," said Mrs. Redman, rising solemnly; "I never thought I'd be spoken to like this."

"No! no! Pray stay. Rest yourself, and take a glass of wine," urged Madeline. "I hope we shall always be very good friends."

"It is no fault of mine," returned Mrs. Redman, "if we are not." She was wonderfully placable. "But I have one or two places to call at, so I'll say good morning."

"And I'm sure how your patience has held out *I* don't know," said the irascible Sharp. Mrs. Redman accepted her arm, and they went slowly and silently down-stairs, pausing on each landing, and followed by Madeline, who saw her grandmother to the door with punctilious respect. The exit was respectably managed; nevertheless, it was a total rout.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Some weeks dragged on rather heavily. Difficulties arose, and after being judiciously enlarged upon by Mr. Blyth, who came out brilliantly in the character of a paternal attorney, were smoothed down. There was a little stilted talk on the part of Messrs. Barker and Layton, Lord Templemore's solicitors, about disputing Madeline's claim by a question of her parents being

legally married. A peremptory mandate from Lady Templemore, however, put a stop to this. And at last, after many fluctuations of opinion and favour in Abingdon Villas, Madeline, accompanied by her uncle and Mr. Blyth, attended sundry dingy authorities in dingy ink-stained offices, and took affidavits, and went through sundry formalities which she could not understand; and then there was a little fuss about having the various securities in which the keen old miserly general had invested his money changed into her name; and there were powers of attorney to be signed. But at last all was arranged, and Madeline, who was still half-puzzled with the enormous change, was persuaded she might inform her pupils that her teaching days were over. This, however, she would not do till she had drawn her first cheque upon her bankers (the same employed by General Digby), where a little official writing made his heavy balance, deposit, &c., all her own. She had met Mr. Payne, a little, dry, uncouth, but honest-looking man, and to her uncle's great surprise, and Mr. Blyth's boundless indignation, determined to adopt him as her man of business. "He has known all about this money for years," she said, quietly, "and will save me trouble." So Mr. Payne, to his great satisfaction, was appointed her man of business. He was a snuffy man, and still wore gaiters, the only pair, it was believed, in Old Jewry; and he generally stood, when being consulted, with his hands behind his back, and raised himself on his toes, and dropped back on his heels, in a monotonous sort of see-saw, while he spoke. On Madeline informing him (which she did personally) that she wished him to continue the management of the property which had been so long in his hands, he was silent for a moment, and then, without any unnecessary politeness, said, "I have no objection." Whereupon he sat down at his desk, and drew forth a long slip of paper covered with writing and figures; then suddenly looking over his spectacles at Madeline, he said:

"I think you are a sensible girl. Are you of age?"

"I will be in a few months."

"Well, there is a list of all the securities your money is invested in. The amount in each, and the yearly percentage it yields. I had intended to go to you with it, if you had not come to me, for you must never trust any one too much. Know your own affairs yourself, and don't be content to see them through other people's glasses."

"Thank you," returned Madeline; "I will read it at my leisure, and come to you for any information I may require. Now will you be so good as to inform me what amount I may, with prudence, spend yearly?"

"Very right," said Uncle John, whom she had brought with her. It was most remarkable, the utter subjugation of Uncle

John to his niece's rule, as was natural, for Madeline was both resolute and reasonable.

"Let me see," returned Mr. Payne, assuming his favourite attitude; "I should say (rising on his toes), two thousand a year would not hurt you. No! (He fell back on his heels.) Two thousand would leave a very good margin."

"Is it possible?" said Madeline, almost appalled at the magnitude of such an income. "Could you tell me what that is a week? I am not accustomed to such large sums."

"Humph! Fifty-two into two thousand. Ah! Somewhere about thirty-eight pounds ten shillings."

"What! every week?" said Madeline, and relapsed into silence.

"Are you thinking how you shall ever spend it all?" asked Mr. John, jocularly.

"No, indeed," said she, laughing; and then turning to the attorney, "I am going to give you some work at once," she said. "I want you to advertise in the *Times*, and elsewhere, if necessary, for a Mr. Christopher Fitzwarrenne, to apply to you, where he shall hear of something to his advantage."

"And what may that be?" asked Payne.

"Whatever I, with your and my uncle's advice, may decide on doing for him," returned Madeline; "after he expounds his own views. He was my only friend when my father died. He is a poor actor, with a large family, and I want to help him."

"Oh! if that's the line you adopt, you will have no difficulty in spending two thousand a year," said the attorney, drily.

"Yes, that is my line, in this particular instance," returned Madeline good-humouredly, but decidedly. And after discussing the terms of the advertisement, she took leave of her new solicitor.

"Look, dear aunty," she said, when about an hour after she entered their sitting-room, for they still occupied their humble lodgings. "Look, what I have brought! A hundred pounds of my *own, own* money; and this—" holding out an enigmatical scrap of paper.

"What is it?" asked Miss Foster.

"It represents a box at the Olympic Theatre. Mr. Downing is out of town, so we will go over for Jessie to-morrow, and make her dine here and go with us."

Then she fell into profound musing; suddenly she exclaimed, "I think you ought to write and tell him!"

"Who, dear?" asked Miss Foster, demurely.

"Mr. Elliott," returned Madeline, steadily, though she coloured and looked away. "He was so kind and good to us, that I should not like to stand on any foolish punctilio. Write to him,

dear aunty, and tell him from me that I know he will rejoice at my good fortune."

Again she lapsed into thought. How vividly she saw Hugh Elliott, and heard his voice, even as he looked and spoke when she had rejected his love. How tender and considerate he had been in his conscious strength! How painfully tight he had pressed her hand in his! And then she thought of those long-fingered, brown hands of his, that looked so strong and capable, without a shadow of coarseness; and the impression of silent perseverance and endurance they always conveyed to her. Suppose she had been heart-whole when she met him—his love, so evidently of a high and unselfish order would certainly have won hers. Probably, by this time they would have been engaged, so that he would be obliged to take her fortune; and then he might have bought some place near his native village and had plenty of horses to gallop about the country, after his Australian fashion, for at least part of the year. "How grand it would be to fill the life of one, deservedly dear, with perpetual sunshine and delight! He has toiled so hard, too, and seems to have enjoyed so little. What pleasure it would have been to have shown him the way to enjoy, had I been able to love him. Ah! his was real love!" And then, naturally, her thoughts turned to the different class of love offered her by Dudley Ashurst. She was surprised to find how far off all that appeared, and that some disenchanting spell seemed to have been breathed over the fascinating memory of her first lover. He was certainly graceful and impassioned—a girl's ideal lover—but he wanted the intense earnestness which gave a certain dignity to Hugh Elliott's comparatively rough exterior. Dudley Ashurst, the spoiled darling of fortune, always borne aloft by sparkling waves of success, how could he—where could he acquire the mingled energy and patience, resolution and self-reliance of the successful sailor-boy, who, from his early submergence under the dark waters of life, had raised himself unaided to the surface by his own strong will and steady purpose? "Had I once admitted that I loved *him*, nothing but death would have separated us; but then I could not! I could never love another." And so she sighed deeply, and roused herself to talk to Miss Foster, yet she was languid and depressed all the evening, and made Miss Foster re-write her note to Hugh Elliott twice, before she would permit it to be posted.

After all, it only produced a written reply, penned in a frank and kindly spirit; but some weeks passed over and he never came to see them.

mother's bank, to her credit, some three hundred pounds; and lastly, having a nice, bright, tasteful little Parisian lady's-maid, who enjoys her business.

"I have, thank God, been able to be of great use to poor Mr. Fitzwarrenne. He had been ill, and was evidently at the lowest ebb in finance when we found him. His projects are, I must say, wild; but we have arranged for the present, and put his two girls to school. Miss Foster is looking so well, and is so happy, only she makes me cross sometimes by her sympathy with her old tyrant, who is, in her turn, utterly subdued by her present companion. Finally, I have bought a house at Richmond. You know how charmed I was when you so kindly drove me down there last summer. One morning, about three weeks ago, I saw a house advertised to be let or sold there. I went down, saw it, liked it, and its old-fashioned furniture; thought that there the Redmans could not come in at all hours; consulted 'my solicitor,' who told me it was 'not dear,' *i. e.* a complete bargain. The owner wanted money immediately, and I had some ready; so I have agreed for it, and the title (they call it) is being made out. I shall have a modest establishment—a cook, a couple of housemaids, and my bright little Céline. And ah! how delightful to have you for a guest when you return!—only I shall never have things nice enough for you! In March, or early in April, we hope to take up our abode at Richmond, and enjoy the beauties of spring. There is my history. I am thankful, and yet I do not feel the joy that this strange turn in my fortunes would have given me two years ago. I sometimes sit and repeat to myself my history. And lo! I am still much alone. Miss Foster, my kind and gentle friend, is very dear to me; but then she is my child, and I have no one near whose strength could uphold me, and to whose judgment I would defer. Am I asking too much when I say I hope *you* will supply this want? I have so much confidence in your sense and your sincerity! Do you see much of the Templemores? Is it not curious their turning out relations of mine? I wonder if we shall ever meet again, and I wonder, too, what is before me. There are so many chances and changes in this mortal life. But I am content to enjoy the present, only I wish I could forget some things.

"I am writing an interminable letter; yet I must not omit to mention that M. Delille has made his appearance once more, and annoys me very much. I perpetually meet him in this neighbourhood. Immediately on his return, he wrote me an absurd, magnanimous letter, stating that in my altered fortunes he would not bind me to our engagement, but that he nevertheless offered himself afresh as a suitor for my hand. I replied decidedly that I never was affianced to him, that he had no claim upon me, that

"I did so by her express desire; and I think she expected you (I know I did) to call."

"I did not see any object in calling," returned Hugh Elliott, gloomily.

"Well, I think you might. It would give both Madeline and myself the greatest pleasure."

"Hum," said Elliott. "And you yourself," he continued, somewhat bitterly, "are you comfortable? Miss Digby does not show any disposition to throw you off as a troublesome reminder of her former poverty?"

"Oh, Mr. Elliott!" said Miss Foster, colouring with wounded feeling. "How can you speak so!"

"I am an uncouth savage," cried Elliott, with frank penitence. "And I beg your pardon. No! she is made of no common stuff; and I am much obliged to you both for wishing to see me. I will call some day. What is the proper hour, for I suppose no one may drop in of an evening now except by a special invitation?"

"You would always be welcome, I am sure," returned Miss Foster. "There is our address," handing him a card. "We always dine at half-past five, any time before that! but I trust we shall be all good friends, and without formality." Miss Foster stopped abruptly. She felt that between her desire to conciliate, and her anxiety not to commit herself, she was growing incoherent. "Well, I am taking up your valuable time," she resumed, seeing that Elliott was lost in thought, and did not attempt to assist her. "So I will just say good morning, hoping to see you soon again."

"No," returned Hugh, "you are not taking up my time. Have you seen Downing lately? How is the famous company getting on?"

"I know nothing of that. Mr. Downing often calls on a Sunday, and Mr. O'Keefe comes also; he often wants Miss Digby to take shares in the 'International,' what do you call it? but she always laughs at him."

"Don't let them persuade her," said Hugh. "I have not seen Downing for a long time. I hear that he has started as a consulting engineer, and is doing well. I hope so, if only for his wife's sake. What has become of that French agent or engineer? What was he? we used to meet him last summer at the Downings."

"Oh! he has returned to London; we sometimes see him."

"Indeed!" said Hugh Elliott, bending over the fire to hide the expression of pain which he felt was upon his face. Silence ensued for a moment, and then Miss Foster rose and held out her hand, saying, "I must go now."

"Good-bye," said Elliott, taking it cordially. "I am very glad

right to the money. Had I not thought so I should have strenuously opposed your claim. Individually I always liked you—you conducted yourself with great propriety while in my employment, though I think the governess I have at present has a more sedative effect on Lady Agnes."

"Really, Lady Templemore," said Madeline, with a sweet, low laugh, "it is charming to hear you speak so naturally, and not affect to ignore that I was once in a sense your dependent. I have been so sickened with the opposite tone which people adopt, as though I had been an heiress all my life."

"Oh! that is very stupid! of course we shall all work into our places by-and-by," said Lady Templemore, "but that is another point I wanted to touch upon. How are you off as to *entourage* —what *chaperon* have you? You know it is a pity to let your advantages slip for want of proper management—you really have great capabilities." Lady Templemore stopped abruptly.

"You are very flattering," said Madeline, smiling.

"Nay—but answer seriously—have you any presentable *chaperon?*"

"I will tell you exactly how I am situated," said Madeline, "as you are good enough to interest yourself in my affairs. I have a lady of good family and pleasing manners living with me, but she is too poor to have any social standing; nevertheless we are very happy, and I am quite content."

"Pooh! nonsense!" returned Lady Templemore. "You think so, now, but you will want social success, if it was only for variety, by-and-by. Now, I think your best plan is to put yourself into my hands. I have a good circle about me. It is true Lady Rawson might bring you out very effectively, but I do not think it would be so useful as the actual acknowledgment of relationship from us."

Madeline's lip curled slightly—the acknowledgment of the Templemores was of small importance to eyes so accustomed to look upon realities as hers. Nevertheless, Lady Templemore meant well, and Madeline knew that nothing was so absurd in the estimation of a worldly woman as Quixotism of any kind. She therefore answered civilly, "I am very much obliged, but what do you mean by putting myself in your hands? Do you mean to say you would take the trouble of being my *chaperon?*"

"Yes," said Lady Templemore, straightforwardly. "I should bring you out with my own daughter—put your name on my cards."

"It is, no doubt, a great advantage," replied Madeline, gravely; "and I shall, if you will permit, avail myself of it to a certain degree, reserving the disposition of my time and the cultivation of my own friends. Suppose you allow me to make my *début* at

"Monsieur," said Madeline, with sudden frankness, "do you wish to be my friend?"

"Without doubt," returned the Frenchman, startled at the change in her manner, and they dropped behind the others.

"Well, then," resumed Madeline, "be content to be only my friend—as a *friend* I am willing, nay, proud, to receive you; but in any other light, no! I will not see you," and Madeline put up a pretty little hand before her eyes. Mons. Delille was silent, thinking in his sudden way if he could not turn this compact to account.

"Yes or no?" said Madeline, with playful impatience, and turning a beaming smile upon the would-be suitor.

"Yes," frankly returned Delille, assuming a chivalrous air. "Let me but bask in your smile and I will be what you like."

"It is an affair agreed then," said Madeline.

"And you will permit me, *comme frère*, to offer for inspection some drawings of the wild coast of Brittany I made while exiled there."

"But yes! certainly." Here Mrs. John suddenly meeting them, paused in her stately career, and called upon Madeline to give counsel respecting a grand party she, Mrs. John, intended giving, and the details of which occupied them till it was time to go in. On their return home they found Mr. Hugh Elliott's card. "Oh!" cried Madeline, a look of positive pain contracting her lip and brow, "how unfortunate!"

"It *is* provoking," said Miss Foster, quite depressed.

"And a card too," said Madeline, with a sad smile. "I really did not think he had one; we never saw any at Kent Terrace. Poor old Kent Terrace! how far away those days seem now. Yet there was much pleasure in them, aunty," and Madeline's eyes looked suspiciously dim. Soon after Miss Foster went away to drink tea and go to church with Mrs. Downing; indeed she (Miss Foster) came in for a good deal of stray attentions, now that it was generally acknowledged she was the favourite factotum and right-hand woman of Miss Digby, the charming heiress, though neither Madeline nor Miss Foster were ever conscious of the slightest change in Jessie. They had been fast friends always, and though she rejoiced in her former schoolfellow's good fortune, not a shadow of envy or worldliness troubled the pure waters of her affection. Madeline was still Madeline to her—the cleverest, boldest, kindest, prettiest girl she had ever known, but not a whit cleverer, kinder, or prettier, than when she sallied forth to seek her fortune at Lady Templemore's.

With the elegant Arthur it was far different. To him the General's heiress was altogether a more interesting, well-informed, right thinking person than little Miss Digby, "out" for a holiday

in her worldliness; yet she is a woman I respect. I do not think anything would tempt her to injure another."

"An excellent character, I am sure," replied Miss Foster.

"She put me through a severe cross-examination, however," resumed Madeline, "and, on the whole, rather approves my plans and intentions, so you see there is one more added to the list of self-constituted directors, who are good enough to superintend my affairs. I think Lady Templemore ought to be chairwoman though! she may really be useful to me if I come to care about the outsides of things, and you know that must not be quite overlooked."

"No, certainly not," said Miss Foster, who was by no means clear as to what her young friend meant.

"Nevertheless I shall not think it right to use her too unsparingly," continued Madeline, "as I have discovered her object, and intend to frustrate it."

"Dear me! what does she want?"

"To marry me to her son, Lord Bracklyn, and so secure the Digby treasure trove to the family!"

"Well, it's not unnatural!"

"No; far from it. I have no doubt Lady Templemore thinks she is arranging the happiness of all parties, but I don't agree with her. Fancy being tied for life to such a refrigerated piece of emptiness as Lord Bracklyn!"

"I am sure I do not know, Madeline, dear. I never saw the young gentleman—I mean the young nobleman; you are so very hard to please!"

"No, indeed, aunty! Only I should like a rational human being for husband, if I ever marry—something stronger than myself; for I am a wretched, weak, fickle creature"—she added, with a burst of self-contempt.

"My dear Madeline!"

"Ah! I am nothing like so good as you think I am! But last night it was very amusing to see the change in Lord Bracklyn. He used to stare at me long ago in such a stupid, persevering manner, that I often felt tempted to startle him by some audacious speech; as to speaking to me, he never dreamed of such a thing. Last night, indeed, he said very little, but that little was addressed to me; and his mother took him into counsel, and in a way they appropriated me. Lord Bracklyn said I ought to ride; and I said I had already arranged to take lessons, and intended to ride a good deal when we went to Richmond; and then his Lordship said, 'Richmond—ah! not a bad idea.' So Lady Templemore observed she was sure Bracklyn would be very glad to look out for a nice lady's horse for me; and he said, 'Very happy, indeed.' However, I kept out of authorizing him. I do not want to be

Yet his privacy was broken in upon by Maria Theresa, who informed him that "the French gentleman wanted to see him." "Oh, when am I to have any peace!" muttered O'Keefe. "Yes, to be sure, let him come in." Whereupon enter M. Delille. "Aha! *mon ami!* what's in the wind now?"—for the officer looked fierce and moody; he was deadly pale, and unshaven.

"My destiny is still adverse," returned Delille, in a deep voice, speaking between his clenched teeth. "She turns from me now that fortune smiles upon her. And I, doomed as I am, I am ordered by that abominable board—the tools, no doubt, of her intriguing uncle—to return to my exile, amid the desolation of their newly-acquired territory. No, O'Keefe, never! They know not this heart!"—a vigorous thump on his chest. "I have set myself free; I have sent in my resignation; I am no longer the slave of their vile tyranny! I——"

"Why, *mille tonnerres!*" cried O'Keefe, pushing back his chair, and throwing his black stump of a pen into the grate, "you have not been and gone and cut your own throat?"

"No, my friend," returned Delille, gravely, and grasping his windpipe as if the idea was a fresh one, and not unacceptable. "No; ha! ha! if I had I should have cut some one else's first!"

"Don't talk like a lunatic," said O'Keefe, impatiently, "if you act like one. What are you going to do now? What do you intend to live upon?"

"My wife's fortune," returned M. Delille, sullenly, with a dull sort of glare in his eyes. "I shall have a right to do so, you know," striking O'Keefe's shoulder with unpleasant force. "How joyfully I would have placed realms at her feet, and thought myself amply rewarded had she condescended to accept them!"

"Faith, he's mighty troublesome," thought O'Keefe, who mortally hated trouble or unpleasantness. "But, *mon cher*," he said aloud, "you havn't got them, and her guardians will be after asking for settlements, and the Lord knows what. You had better just get over this crotchet, and I'll take care your resignation is not accepted."

"Ah, ha! O'Keefe!" cried Delille, with a ringing, uncomfortable laugh, "are you, too, a traitor? Guard thyself, for I have staked my soul on this venture! And she—she who ought to have been my wife years ago—she wavers—she is changed—oh! false heart!" And M. Delille shook his clenched hand at some fancied antagonist.

"Come now, my good fellow," said O'Keefe, soothingly, "be reasonable. Miss Digby never gave you any encouragement. As to her silence respecting your letter giving consent, how the deuce was she to write when she did not know where you were? And at any rate, you do not know but she might take a fancy to you

quiet. You can try your chance at Mrs. Redman's ball on the 12th. But I declare you take a wrong view of the subject. See, now, I'll manage to have your resignation refused. We mustn't cut off a safe retreat, eh? You keep up your spirits, and don't talk like the hero of a melodrama."

"Ah, you mock me!" cried Delille. "No matter; we shall see," and catching up his hat, he walked quickly out of the room, slamming the front door after him with startling violence.

"Faith, this is a pretty business," soliloquized O'Keefe, gathering his papers together, and thrusting them into a drawer in his writing table. "You're more trouble than you are worth, me boy. Any way Miss Digby shan't be bothered with you. I'll give her a hint." Then, making a short, energetic search in the chaos of his pockets, and on the invisibility of the floor: "the devil go with you for a key, I never saw the like of you for getting lost. But sure it's no matter. Who'll care to look into my papers, and it's little they'll find if they do. Three o'clock, by Jove! The plagues of Egypt were a trifle to you, Delille!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

As the weeks rolled on, Madeline found business engagements multiply around her. It was true she bought house and furniture ready to her hand, but then there were many small addenda to be supplemented, and servants to be hired, and arrangements to be made, for she grew anxious to be at home in her own house. And although the weather was still cold, there were intermittent glimpses of spring, which made both Miss Foster and herself long to be settled in Richmond in time to see the first outbreak of spring foliage and flowers. Lady Templemore proved very useful at this period. It is true that she endeavoured to reduce Madeline to a mere paying puppet, and to organize her establishment on a footing somewhat similar to her own, but our plucky little heroine stuck with remarkable tenacity of purpose, though amiability of manner, to her own ideas on this subject, and had her own way. But in the matter of establishing a dressmaker, arranging for a carriage and horses with a job-master, and purchasing some articles of furniture, Lady Templemore's advice and assistance were invaluable. As to purchasing a riding horse, Madeline still declined Lord Bracklyn's services. She hardly knew why. She said she did not yet know whether she should like riding sufficiently to keep a horse, that she would not give Lord Bracklyn needless trouble, &c. And so she kept her own counsel, and pursued her riding lessons very successfully, for she was light, active, and courageous, with the courage of youth, health, and common

plussed for an example. Madeline laughed to herself—"No doubt her position is totally different from yours; but still she is a woman of some weight, and much popularity."

"No doubt, no doubt," returned Lady Templemore, quickly, "indeed, she has always conducted herself with much discretion, but then she is for ever having some wonderful attraction at her house, as if she must draw people, instead of standing on her rights towards society—music and charades, and notorieties, and all that—a little flighty, you know."

"Well," returned Madeline, smiling at the doctrine that it is undignified to make one's house attractive, "is it not meritorious to render amusement intellectual and less stereotyped than it is usually?"

"Perhaps so, but you must cultivate a different set if you want to make a really good marriage, which I suppose is your object?"

"No, indeed, it is not," returned Madeline.

"I give you credit for more sense than a mere missish disclaimer," said Lady Templemore, coolly; "then may I ask what is your object?"

"I doubt if I have any," replied Madeline, laughing merrily and sweetly, "I only want to enjoy myself, and live not altogether selfishly."

"Hum," said Lady Templemore; "the religious evangelical line might suit you, they are a very high and influential set still; however, you must just feel your way, but believe me, you will find matrimony essential to position, unless, indeed, you had been a member of some powerful family. By the way, I promised Mrs. Mackenzie Dashwood to take you to her dancing party on Tuesday next; you will come, of course?"

"Thank you, yes,—but stay, what day of the month will Tuesday be?"

"Oh, the 11th."

"Very well, I can go, and shall be most happy."

"Why," asked Lady Templemore, sharply, "have you any engagements?"

"Mrs. John Redman gives a party on the 12th, and of course I must go."

"Well, Miss Digby, you know my advice to you has always been to make a stand against these Redman people at once; they will only be more difficult to get rid of the longer you let them hang about you, and may prove a serious impediment to your making a good solid settlement."

"My dear Lady Templemore," returned Madeline, a little warmly, "it is impossible I could throw off such near relatives as an uncle and a grandmother, in the short, sharp, and decisive

determined she shall be of some use, so I've got near all her plate, and the supper table will look uncommon rich, I can tell you. I suppose Madeline wouldn't bring her music, now? No, it wouldn't be right, perhaps, to ask; indeed, we see so little of her, since she has taken up with the Templemores, that I scarce thought she would come to me;" for of course, Madeline was a bone of contention to her relatives' new friends.

Somewhat tired, from having been late the night before, Madeline looked paler and softer than usual, as she entered Mrs. John's very crowded rooms on the eventful evening. She wore a rich soft white silk, made softer still by a quantity of white blonde lace, a bouquet of fragrant, brilliant hot-house flowers in her bosom; her own rich hair arranged in a coronet studded with large violet velvet pansies, with which flowers her sleeves were also looped up, and a piece of violet velvet clasped round her throat with a diamond star, the only piece of jewellery she had purchased. She leaned on Miss Foster's arm, and both seemed and felt more diffident than on entering the brilliant assemblage where so different a society had been gathered the evening before. There, she felt she was an insignificant item—here, she was the cynosure of all eyes.

Mrs. John, resplendent in an emerald green velvet, with a headdress of gold and pearls, and red feathers, kissed her audibly at the door in the face of the whole congregation, and told her she was looking charming; and that half a dozen people were waiting to be introduced to her; that dancing had begun, but that she had a nice partner for her, &c. &c.

Madeline looked round and seemed to see all the people she had ever met at Mrs. John's assembled before her. There were Mr. and Mrs. Blyth, who had for some time ceased their civilities, and Mr. and Mrs., Miss and Master Comerford, Captain Featherwig—more limp and dislocated than ever, and, towering above his compeers, the broad jovial countenance of the great O'Keefe: while close to him, with folded arms, and leaning against the side of a window—the gloomy melodramatic figure of M. Delille. All were recognized at a glance; but there was one figure absent, on whose presence Madeline had counted, in an instinctive, unreasoning manner; and that one she could not perceive. Mr. Downing was there looking rather out of his element, and Mrs. Downing, in a quiet black moiré—very pretty, but a little homely; to her side Madeline attached herself, and felt a little less uncomfortable. There was an atmosphere of simple goodness and truth about Jessie that was always soothing. Presently Miss Foster, who had been patronized by uncle John himself, came to inform Madeline that "grandmamma" was in the dining-room (which

Fontarce, to be the husband of the richly gifted creature before her—was more than she could bear with equanimity.

"Well, and how are you?" she said, in more acidulated tones than Madeline had heard for a long time. "I am sure it can do no one good to come into a crowd and heat like this;" and she glared through one glass, and over the other, of her spectacles at the obnoxious Frenchman.

"I daresay you do feel the heat and crowd unpleasant, unused as you are to such things," said Madeline, soothingly. "M. Delille begs to be presented to you," she added, a good deal amused at the unmistakable antagonistic aspect of the "respectable Redman."

"I have so often heard the aunt of mademoiselle speak of madame," said Delille, endeavouring to make himself agreeable, "that I imagine I already know her."

"You're very much mistaken then," retorted grandma' shortly, "for *she* knew very little about me, nor I about her, but that little was enough."

Delille looked inquiringly at Madeline, who felt personally wounded by this rudeness.

"Mrs. Redman means she never had the pleasure of meeting Madame la Comtesse."

"You are never going to dance in that mob?" asked Mrs. Redman querulously as the dancers began to assemble.

"It does not seem very wise," returned Madeline laughing, "but I suppose I must."

"And who is to say, 'must,' to Miss Digby, *I'd* like to know," said O'Keefe, pushing through the crowd, and presenting a vast expanse of white waistcoat, while he seemed to have tied a tablecloth round his neck.

"Ah, Mr. O'Keefe! that inexorable thing called circumstances, which we *must* all obey."

"Well, if circumstance wasn't a female, which I contend it is, it would be like meeself, your humble servant, especially if it had eyes this present minit. Ah, ha, Delille! *mon ami*, mademoiselle has had a Parisian *modiste*. *I* can see she likes all things French."

"*Est ce vrai*," whispered Delille, with an eager glance.

"To a certain degree," returned Madeline with a smile, while O'Keefe addressing himself to grandma', exclaimed,—

"Faith I needn't ask if I have honour of addressing Mrs. Redman, the likeness speaks for itself. It's a gratification to see a lady of your age and experience taking an interest in the amusements of the young. Allow me to present myself. I have the honour of being a connection of yours through our charming young friend here, besides being the particular friend of your excellent son."

side. M. Delille retired moodily, and Madeline quickly forgetting the annoyance he had caused her in a more engrossing interest, exclaimed, "Dear aunty! Mr. Elliott is here!"

"Indeed! where? I am so glad!"—as she spoke Hugh came into the room looking sharply round, as if seeking something, then his brow cleared, and a kindly smile played for a moment on his lips and in his dark eyes, as he perceived the two friends, and the next moment he held Miss Foster's hand in his.

Madeline longed to hear him speak, yet she felt unaccountably embarrassed. The last words she had heard from his lips were an assurance that had he known he was to meet her he would not have come, was that the case now?

"I am very happy to see you again," he said cordially to Miss Foster, and then, turning to Madeline, bowed and observed, "this is the first opportunity I have had of congratulating you, Miss Digby. I do so most sincerely."

"Thank you," returned Madeline, with a soft, shy, upward glance, and holding out her hand with a frank grace all her own. He took it kindly, but did not hold it one second longer than was absolutely necessary. Yet, through all this quiet self-possession, what abandonment to the joy of the moment reigned in his passionate though controlled heart! How after the steady self-denial of months all had been swept away by the temptation of the moment to go to Mrs. John Redman's hall, and gaze upon her once more, and hear her varying voice! Once more, only once! he said to himself—and now he was beside her. She seemed embarrassed, ill at ease—was she annoyed to meet him? No, he did not quite think that, so he was silent, and she thought in vain for some suitable phrase. At last she said—

"I am so glad you are here, for we go to Richmond to-morrow, and that is so far off I suppose we shall never see you."

There was a little under-current of pique in her playfulness which puzzled Elliott greatly. He answered gravely, "If I can be of any use to you and Miss Foster, I shall be happy to ride down any day to see you."

"Do you ride now?" asked Madeline, recovering her old familiar tone. "That is a great improvement, eh! Mr. Elliott?"

He smiled. "It is the only thing I care much about." And almost involuntarily he dropped into a chair beside her.

"Yes, it is a charming exercise," resumed Madeline, feeling a strange lightness and sudden appreciation of the excellence of all things. "I, too, ride, that is, I take lessons. Ah, Mr. Elliott, what a wonderful change for me! And I have bought a house at Richmond. What do you think of that! A whole house! All my own! You know I was so long poor that I can only learn that I am rich by little bits."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE day after Mrs. John's ball, Madeline and Miss Foster removed to Richmond. This was a very happy period. There was an internal spring and revival in Madeline's heart, which would have strengthened her to endure sorrow, how much then of additional sunshine it lent to her pleasant surroundings may be imagined.

Auburn Lodge was an old-fashioned house; its entrance was a wide low door in the road-side wall, which admitted into a long porch. Within was the hall door proper; this was the back of the house. In front a small velvet-like lawn studded with a few flower-beds, and shaded by large trees at the sides, sloped to the river. It was a roomy, unpretending house, with bay-windows and innumerable cupboards, and had lately been renovated for some expected inmate with a good deal of taste. The old-fashioned furniture supplemented harmoniously; the windows draperied with clean, cool-looking chintz, and the fire-places decorated with coloured tiles. It was a warm, elderly-looking, red-brick house; the rubicund front softened and partly covered with clematis.

To Madeline it seemed at once a splendid domain and a paradise! Then it was charming to be received by two exquisitely neat, good-looking, young women, in caps quite as dainty as grandma's parlour-maid wore, with the deference due to a mistress —to sit down to a simple but elegantly served little dinner, and after to inspect the careful putting away of a very considerable stock of pretty dresses and clothes in the wardrobes and chests of drawers by Mademoiselle Céline, who gently, but decidedly, disapproved the change of residence. Then it was equally delightful to examine into the state of Miss Foster's accommodation, and see that she had all possible comforts, and felt herself at home.

"Was it not a happy idea, dear aunty, to take this nice old house. I do not think I shall ever tear myself away," said Madeline, as she poured out the tea, the evening after their arrival. "Though, to be sure, there is Lady Templemore's great party on the 22d, to which I am pledged, that will entail a day or two in town," she added, laughing.

"So much the better," said Miss Foster. "It would never do to bury yourself, and you will enjoy your home all the more when you return."

"I dare say you are right! how incredible it all seems! yesterday, as it were, we were pondering if we dared lay out four-and-sixpence in buying a metal teapot, and to-day, lo! I have a silver one—a French maid, and a villa at Richmond. Ah, dear aunty!

let us never lose that dear old teapot. What a source of pride and satisfaction it was at the time. And God grant me sobriety of mind."

"Amen," said Miss Foster, softly. "It is an excellent gift," there was a short pause.

"I tell you what we will do," resumed Madeline. "Mr. Downing is going to France on some engineering mission next month, and we will have Jessie and the baby to stay here all the time he is away. It will do them so much good. By the way, Lady Rawson ought to be at home now,—at least Lord Templemore and Lady Agnes were expected yesterday."

"It will be very nice for you to have Lady Rawson back," said Miss Foster.

"Yes. I think we must drive in to-morrow and inquire about her."

The next day was bright and warm. It was a peculiarly fine spring, and already the first delicious flush of green was stealing over the large trees, and bursting fully forth over the hedges and small shrubs; the river was already gay with boats, and all Richmond bright with that indescribable air of pleasure and prosperity which it generally wears in fine weather, from early spring till the leaves have fallen.

The friends had agreed to have an early dinner, and to drive into town afterwards. It was nearly one o'clock. Madeline was writing some notes on business, of which class of writing she had a good deal. She sat in one of the bay-windows, which was open, and framed in a pretty drawing-room landscape of the lawn with its shrubs and flowers, and a peep of the river beyond. The room was fragrant with spring blossoms, and had a pleasant home-like look, as though every day life went on there with quiet refinement. Miss Foster, who understood something of the management of a garden, was in deep consultation with the gardener in a little green-house, which was hidden behind one of the shrubberies. Madeline thought she heard the front door bell, but scarce heeded it; when suddenly Lady Rawson was beside her, and pressing a hearty kiss on her forehead, "My dear child! Here I am! only arrived the day before yesterday, and had not one moment to myself since; but I was determined to see you to-day."

"This *is* joy, indeed," cried Madeline. "We were going in to inquire after you to-day. How good of you to come out."

"And this is your own house, Madeline! You are monarch of all you survey! How do you stand it, little one?" And Lady Rawson placed her hands on Madeline's shoulders, and held her back while she looked into her face with a keen, searching glance. "I see traces of the same spirit I left behind. You must not think me a wretch for writing so seldom and so shortly. I hate

writing; I never write, and now I want to know everything What a charming room. What a pretty dress! how evident the blaze of prosperity that shines upon you."

"Yes," returned Madeline, drawing her to a sofa, "it is indeed a mighty change. I seem to have scarce got my breath yet. It is almost too great for happiness at first. But now you are come I shall be all right. I have wanted you so much; for you have both worldly wisdom and a heart—two essentials in a counsellor."

"I thought Lady Templemore had taken you in hand," said Lady Rawson, untying her bonnet; "and she is a very sensible woman."

"Yes; but she is all sense, and nothing else. You will stay to luncheon; that is, our early dinner?" continued Madeline, delightedly. "How charming to have you as a guest."

"*I* think it is charming to *be* your guest," said Lady Rawson, patting her cheek; "so ring the bell, and I will send word to the coachman to put up till eight o'clock. I shall have a cup of tea then, and go home."

"I left Lord Templemore in Paris," continued Lady Rawson, "with Lady Agnes. She is very delicate: quite knocked up with the journey and unable to come on. She is a sweet thing—a diluted likeness of yourself; by the way, she is quite enthusiastic about you, and eager for a meeting; they will be back on the twenty-first—the day before Lady Templemore's ball. I suppose you are to be there? In short, if you like, you may be the fashion."

"I do not care one straw about it," replied Madeline, with perfect sincerity; "I want to be quiet, to be happy, to make up for the gaps in my life. Is it not curious, dear friend, how insensibly the bitterness of memories exhale their rancour in the warmth and glow of such prosperity as mine? I know that I have had cruel moments, but I seem to remember them in a dim unreal manner; as if they no longer touched me personally."

"It is true," returned Lady Rawson, thoughtfully; "I know it from experience; and mine have been far more bitter memories than yours could possibly be!"

"It is better it should be so," said Madeline, as if to herself; "better and more healthy that sunshine should dispel the gloom and disperse the mist, than to keep a reserve fund of uncomfortable recollections to draw upon, nominally for contrast, but in reality to spoil the bright present."

"Well said, young philosopher," returned Lady Rawson; "and here comes Miss Foster, an excellent example of your system, looking several years younger than when I saw her last. Miss Foster," rising and shaking hands with her cordially, "I am truly pleased to see you."

"I am sure so am I, to meet your ladyship once more. And isn't Madeline looking well. Ah, Lady Rawson! I owe my life to her! I had such an illness; and she nursed me!—I can't tell you how she nursed me!" Then they talked of various people and things: of Lady Rawson's winter at Naples, and the people she met there; and Madeline gave a humourous description of the sudden love the Redman family had evinced for her; and then came a delightful interlude of dinner:—a slice of salmon; a delicate shoulder of lamb, with delicious fresh salad, cut that morning in Madeline's own garden; a cold chicken pie; and a rhubarb tart, with cream. Madeline's pretty parlour maid waited on them deftly; and there was a fresh daintiness about all things that enchanted Lady Rawson, used as she was to life "*en grand tenue.*"

"Really, Madeline, I like the line you have adopted amazingly: you understand and do it well: and then there is something so wonderful now-a-days in the total absence of pretension, something so revivifying in real comfort, without a crowd of useless, embarrassing luxuries, that I should not be surprised if pretty girl waiters, and *ménages à la Madeline*, became the rage, to the immense relief of our finances."

"I adopted this style," returned Madeline, "because it was a little within the range of my powers: I tremble at the idea of a butler and footman."

"No; you must wait for a husband to manage such small deer. Eh! mademoiselle?" with a sharp glance.

"And as that is at present a mere possibility," returned Madeline, coolly, "I shall deal with the materials I understand."

"The carriage is at the door, mem," said the servant, suddenly.

"Not mine?" asked Lady Rawson.

"No; one I had ordered to go and inquire about you, dear Lady Rawson," said Madeline.

"I think I shall take advantage of it to do some of the shopping we had planned," observed Miss Foster; "and I shall also call on Mrs. Redman."

"Hear her!" cried Madeline, laughing, "I assure you, my grandmother exercises the most extraordinary fascination over her. She cannot keep away. I am always in fright lest she should renounce me, and resume her chains."

"Well, my dear, you know I lived so long with Mrs. Redman."

"The last reason *I* should imagine for wishing to see any more of her," returned Madeline, still laughing. "However, do exactly as you like, dear aunty; but say something civil for me."

When Miss Foster was gone, Madeline put on a broad-leafed grey hat, which gave a Charles the Second style to her toilet, and they strolled down the lawn to a sheltered seat, from whence the

wide bend of the river, gay with boats, and rich with surrounding foliage, lay before them.

"This is delightful," said Lady Rawson; "and how English! this orderly, but toilsome amusement, with its tone of healthy strength, contrasted with the fiery, languid, passionate, indolent picturesqueness, with which I have been familiar for the last six or seven months, is like the play of grown men compared to the sport of spoiled children. But *cara mia* you are very fortunate in that Miss Foster of yours; she is a gentlewoman, and though a simple soul, has the tact of a true heart; she is gone to see that Redman woman just to leave us *tête-à-tête*, and I'm much obliged to her. I shall cross-examine you forthwith, for God knows when I shall have such another chance."

"Speak, and I will answer," said Madeline, smiling.

"First, what is your disposable income? *real* income, mind; for I must warn you against believing *any* sum inexhaustible, which is a common creed with persons who have suddenly been raised from poverty to riches."

"I have no doubt you are right. Mr. Payne, my cross, but, I believe, honest old lawyer, says I may safely spend two thousand a year; and as I begin to understand my own affairs, I think he is right."

"A very pretty little property, upon my word. How you will have to 'ware fortune hunters!" Lady Rawson paused for a moment, and resumed rather thoughtfully: "Have you ever seen Ashurst—I mean Lord Hexham—since my memorable party a year ago?"

"No," said Madeline. "He has passed out of my life—almost out of my memory."

"That is well; though I suspect he has been supplanted, or he would not be so readily forgotten. I saw him at Naples in the winter: he is certainly very agreeable and handsome; they say he was very closely *liéd* with the Marchesa di Carrara—she was a Pole, a most fascinating personage—but I don't know if it was true; not unlikely, you know."

"Is it possible?" said Madeline, vaguely; mortified and humiliated to think how nearly she had sacrificed her life for the passing fancy of a man like this.

"'Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do,'" said her ladyship. "If men are not in business, they are in mischief; especially if they are of the right sort. My dear Madeline, I fondly hope it was my warning that fine September evening at the Grange, that saved you."

Madeline smiled a little bitterly: "I do not think it was, dear friend; I scarce know what kept me back; I was so alone; my life was so uncongenial. I tell you I had sat down deliberately

to write my consent to his schemes, when something I could not define traced the opposite words from what I intended to write; and so I am here, fit to associate with you and the rest of the correct world."

"With me," returned Lady Rawson, with a curious smile.

"You know," resumed Madeline, "I do not think I really loved Lord Hexham. He dazzled me a little, and I shrank from the life which was before me."

"And," interrupted Lady Rawson, looking at her keenly, "you have since learned what love—real love—is!"

"Perhaps so," said Madeline, steadily, while her cheek crimsoned, and then slowly paled.

"I trust in Heaven," cried Lady Rawson, a little impatiently, "you are not going to make a fool of yourself! there is scarce any man worth being loved; and I hoped you would make a judicious marriage, where a sound worldly position, and quiet mutual liking, might make life smooth and comfortable!"

"Ah!" cried Madeline, passionately; "can youth, and something of good looks, the power to give and receive pleasure, a true heart, and a brave spirit—for these things *are* mine—bring me no more than quiet mutual liking? Must I forego the sparkle, the crown of the cup, to drink such dregs as this?"

She covered her face with her hands as she spoke. Lady Rawson looked at her with a sad, but sympathising, expression.

"You would be quite right to reject the dregs if you could get anything better—but suppose you can't?" said Lady Rawson. "Believe me, there is very little of what deserves to be called true love in the world—I mean among men, women here and there are capable of it—and I would have you take care *how* you give good gold in exchange for forged notes."

"Better waste paper in exchange for one's gold, than to shut it up and bury it underground, like a miser; it might be many a long day before one discovered that the notes were not genuine."

"Yes! it is natural that should be your doctrine," returned Lady Rawson, thoughtfully. "I do not know that warnings are of much avail; nay more, it is somewhat against my grain I utter them; but it *is* so disappointing to form a high ideal of men, indeed, of almost any man, and then find out what the raw material is—believe me it is very raw—they always show their most rugged side to the women who are tied to them. Madeline! I feel so inclined to do what I do think I never did before for any one—recapitulate my history: not by way of a warning or a lesson, for no one ever learns by the experience of another, but simply because I should like you to know it, and because I think you are safe."

"I think I am. And oh! dear friend! with what interest I shall listen."

Lady Rawson patted Madeline's cheek; and leaning her head on her hand, sat for a few minutes gazing away, seemingly at the river, but really back up the stream of her own life; her great black eyes looking like deep wells of memory; then, without moving, she began, speaking slow and softly:

"I was a country girl. My father was a Yorkshire farmer; a stout, hale, thoughtless, sporting man. Oh! so kind and pleasant. Always ready to make his child's present happy, but utterly reckless of her future. My mother died when I was a baby; and from the time I can remember anything I was the queen of my home, rough as it was. We had a sort of a cousin, on my mother's side, who lived in one of the large manufacturing towns. He used to come to us in the hunting season and the shooting season, and was always the crack rider and the crack shot. (He was not town-bred, you know, though he then lived in a town.) He was a good deal older than I was, though a young man. Ah, Madeline! how handsome he was! A tall, fair, powerfully-made man, with such a careless, bright smile, and brilliant teeth, and keen, light-blue eyes, that never overlooked anything. He was very popular, and my father's right-hand. As to me—he was the God of my idolatry! How I worshipped him and believed in him! And with what transparent wiles I strove to hide my adoration and seem independent! Well, he fell in love with me. Yes! He certainly did love me in his way; and one evening he raised me to the highest pinnacle of earthly glory, by asking me to be his wife! My father was highly pleased—wonderfully pleased—and rather in a hurry to marry us. Dick (that was my intended) seemed ready enough, only he said that he should like to furnish a house first. He was an attorney in Leeds, and considered a rising man.

"My father got over all these difficulties, and it became soon known in our little world that I was to be married in a month. A few days before the wedding, Dick and my father had been closeted for a long time together, at last he came to me in my little sitting-room, where I was busily sewing my wedding clothes, and he sat down by me. There was something curious in his expression, hard and set. 'By Jove, Madge,' he said, 'you are right to do all you can for yourself. You are a poor man's daughter, and you are going to be a poor man's wife!'

"'You have enough for all I want," said I, laughing; 'but I can hardly think you can call my father a poor man.' I thought, every one thought, he was rich and myself an heiress. Dick laughed an unpleasant laugh. 'That is all you know about it. Your father has not really an acre he can call his own! The farm is deeply mortgaged; the interest is unpaid; and the mort-

gagees on the point of foreclosing! Pleasant, eh, Madge? The old man might have confided in me a little sooner. Never mind; you are worth something in yourself, and'—with a deep oath—'nothing shall rob me of my gipsy.' He always called me a gipsy, I was so dark. Then he caught me to his heart, and kissed me over and over again; but his kisses were more alarming than soothing, and I felt strangely disturbed. Yet, innocent as I then was of life and reality, I never dreamed of releasing him from his engagement. So we were married. For a fortnight or three weeks he was almost fiercely fond; and that ecstatic period, as it is generally supposed to be, was to me, young and utterly inexperienced, a most uncomfortable time.

"To my father he was implacable. To the careless, kindly, generous old man, he was simply brutal. By the time I was two months a wife I had learned the real stuff of which my idol was made. He was a hard, sensual, clever, avaricious man; full of ambition, with great natural ability. Had he lived he would have risen high, very high. But, oh! my God! how he ground me to the dust. And how long, how long after the scales had begun to fall from my sight, I held them forcibly, as it were, to my eyes, shrinking from the deadly desolation of the truth. I longed so for his love! Poor fellow, he had none to give. It is true that he would still, when in the mood, caress me, and twine his fingers in my hair as if it gave him pleasure (he never praised me), or suddenly call me to him and kiss me, if I had on something new, or looked different from usual; but his very caresses were hard! Let me go to him ever so yearning for kindness, his touch would wither it all. And as for coming to him when I felt low and sad, for the comfort of laying my head against his breast, or feeling the silent sympathy of a hand-pressure, I soon learned I was not to think of such things. No! when bright and well-dressed, a pretty acceptable toy, I might give and receive caresses; but when sentimental or weak, or anything but in the highest health and spirits, away with me, out of sight, to fight my own battles single-handed. What right had a slave to tease her master with her fancies?

"Then, though a moment before I had been held passionately to his heart, if the slightest error in household management or economy attracted his notice, he would swear at me as he would at the rudest groom, and curse the day he was betrayed into an imprudent marriage. I had not the least bit of sacredness in his eyes; nothing had that was neither rich nor successful! But how clever he was; and just and true too, to outsiders. It is easy for the bold and strong to be true; and his character for prudence, and conduct, and integrity, spread and grew, and great men of the country came to place themselves in his hands, and I dwindled

morally day by day under the horrible mingling of his bitter harshness and his insulting caresses. He had worked hard to bring my father's affairs into order, and done it well; all creditors were paid, and the poor old man had a trifle left, barely enough, with intense management, to keep life and soul together, and he couldn't manage a bit; so I had him on my hands, *sub rosa* almost, for he was scarce allowed into the house. Ah! how broken-hearted I was! How I used to pray for death. What a poor, terrified, lying slave he made me! How I crawled at his feet, and gave up my individuality to earn his approbation, and made a puppet of myself. And yet all the time what a frank, good husband he seemed to outsiders. He never went from home without me; he always made me dress well, our home, though small, was well kept and appointed! Oh! how marvellously well he knew the value of money; when to save and when to expend. How cleverly he kept his shabbiness from all eyes but mine, and mine were not worth blinding. How handsomely he could subscribe to some county undertaking; and how instantaneously detect the diminution of a decanter, left half full the night before, if I dared to take a glass of sherry at my early dinner.

"At last, when I was more than two years married, I had a little girl. This was a great delight—not that *I* wished for children, but *he* did—and I thought it would soften him; but no! He was passionately fond of the child, was tender beyond measure to it, but now that I had brought it into the world, I subsided into my normal condition of insignificance.

"I interfered very little with the baby. I hardly felt as if I had any right to do so; and the dear thing did not love me, but took so lovingly to her father, much to his triumph! It would make my story far too long were I to tell you all I suffered on my poor father's account. Really if that man, my husband, could have realised what he inflicted, I do not think even he would have done it.

"When my baby was about two years old, she seemed suddenly to turn to me; and, ah! what a delight she became. How my whole soul concentrated itself in her. I said to my aching heart, 'There is life, and hope, and joy before us yet.' But by the time she had been about six months this source of pleasure, a terrible fever seized her, and in a week I was once more alone.

"It is long, long since I have given this memory utterance! And, gracious God! how my heart aches and quivers again as I reopen its wounds. I have had great success. I am rich. I hold a higher social place than my wildest dreams ever pictured. Yet it seems as if a handful of dust and ashes had been given to me in a mocking exchange for my golden-haired darling."

Lady Rawson stopped abruptly, clasped her hands together,

and then wrung them slowly apart, as if some positive pain had seized her.

"Neither the sweet child's life or death drew us together," she resumed. "For a few days my husband was beaten down and dependent upon me, and therefore kinder and more tender. The hard, hard crust which enveloped the small morsel of humanity within him was rent by the violence of affliction; but it soon closed up again. The day after my little love was laid in the grave I was very weary and exhausted; for, indeed, I had been in constant attendance on my husband, seeking to soothe him, and he had now returned to his daily business. The servant kindly urged me to take a glass of port wine; I did so. After dinner that day he looked with his keen, searching, blue eyes at the decanter. 'Some one has been meddling with my wine.' 'No, dear,' I said, fearing he might accuse the servant, 'I took a glass to-day, feeling much in need of it.' 'Hum; I see, I must take to locking up my own wine,' was the reply."

"Can it be true?" ejaculated Madeline.

"True enough, child. Well, another eighteen months of barren existence dropped in leaden drops away, and then I was a widow. Our town was scourged with cholera, and my husband was among the victims. It was strange to look at his handsome face, so gentle and noble in the repose of death, and think what he had been! I shed few tears; I had buried the bright, handsome, winning man I once loved so much, long before, and in truth I felt glad to be free. But I was very poor; my husband had always contrived to make both ends meet, but had only just begun to lay by; so after all little debts were paid, I had scarcely fifty pounds in the world, and my poor father to keep. I had little or no education, and less taste, for the part of a governess, so I turned to the stage, and got on very well. Gradually, the quick growth of mind and feeling fitted themselves to their new circumstances, and hid the jagged ruins of the old life out of sight, though they were there still; and I was successful. It was not a nice life exactly; there was a good deal in it to wound sensitive delicacy; but as desperate and dangerous illness sometimes renovates the constitution, so I seemed to have become hard and strong from trial and disappointment. I could stand alone, and not a whisper was ever breathed against me. It was at this period, Madeline, I knew your father."

Madeline's profound interest in Lady Rawson's vividly told tale could scarce be deeper, yet it grew more intense at these words "I have so longed to hear of your acquaintance with him," she said.

"I was playing with the company in which I had been first engaged," resumed Lady Rawson, "and in a garrison town. The

officers of a very gay regiment of cavalry patronised me, especially the major, a cold, keen, selfish *roué*, who thought all women fair game, actresses in particular; but he met his match in me. I was as hard, and as cold, and as daring as himself; so after a little fencing, he discovered the real flow of the current, then he hated me. We broke the buttons off our foils, and it was thrust and parry in real earnest. Your father was captain in the regiment. God be with him! he was a real gentleman, though even then halfway gone to the dogs. Poor fellow! a judicious friend at the right time might have saved him, or a wife, like myself, for instance; but he was terribly extravagant and unsteady. Curious enough, though a great admirer of beauty (I was a beautiful woman, then, Madeline), he never made love to me, but he always treated me with a tender respect, that was like oil and wine to my sore, strong heart. He must have been a charming lover, for he was full of that innate chivalrous delicacy towards women which elevates both the giver and the receiver. It would take hours to tell how he stood my friend against that vindictive, evil-minded man, who did his best to injure me. At last he left the regiment. I had left the town some time before. Once again we met. I was then in London, and drawing good houses, strangely enough, by my performance of comedy. He then told me he was on the eve of marriage with a charming girl, who had lots of money. I heard incidentally after that he had gone to pieces and become a 'total wreck.' I had almost forgotten him, when I fell in with you at the Grange; then I seemed to know you instinctively.

"To make a long story short, I had not been long in London when my poor father died. He had shared the vicissitudes of my dramatic life, and we had been very happy together. I did my best for him, thank God! I think I succeeded in gathering much comfort and gladness round his declining years! Well, it was terribly lonely when he was gone—only myself to strive for—only outside excitement and amusement; I began to weary of my work. The real enthusiasm which lends such a charm to life and its pursuits had been burnt out of me. In my inmost soul I cared for nothing, and believed in nothing, but rest and material comfort. I liked to read queer, dry, scientific books. I know more than I ever let out, Madeline. Society does not like blue women. Just about this time a grave, respectable stockbroker, who had wandered, in some unaccountable way, out of his orbit and into mine, asked me to marry him. He had a nice house at Clapham, and a neat brougham; he seemed quiet and reasonable; he offered to settle four hundred a year upon me; and I said 'Yes!' I can tell you I looked to see that the lawyers made all safe! I did not care about the man; but he was not

knew. Nevertheless we were very comfortable, and I had his whole confidence. Our connection was much more like a partnership than a marriage, and though a little difficult sometimes, he was really a gentleman. We had a charming society round us, and I was very useful to him. Poor man! he had the making of a fine fellow, but the rottenness of the *régime* to which he belonged spoilt him! He had a lingering, painful illness, through which he was always patient and well-bred; and I hope and believe I was a comfort to him to the last. He is dead about five years, and I am as firmly fixed in London society as if I had been born in the purple, and had never shed bitter tears over the socks I darned and the shirts I mended for my first tyrant, the country attorney! What a curious coil life is! I was twice as much valued, and loved, and respected, by the two men whom I managed—held my own with, and occasionally lied to—than by the first, who had the whole truth, and faith, and earnestness of my better, my best, self laid lovingly at his feet! Indeed, I have observed that, as I have deteriorated within, so have I succeeded without! Nevertheless, dear Madeline, strange, empty, sinking sensations at times creep over me, and show me the dry bones of the things among which I live; and then I long for the quiet tenderness of a home, with children and children's children round me! Yes! I have been successful—wonderfully successful! I have had plenty of lead, and wood, and composition, surprisingly well gilt, in my life; but of true gold, only one little bit—very pure—and now safe in that treasury 'where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal;' and oh! with what truth I can add, 'where my treasure is, there is my heart also!' Come, dear child, I have lived through thirty years in ——" looking at her watch. "Is it possible!—nearly two hours!"

"There is a very smart riding-master here," replied Madeline, "and I shall take lessons from him, which will provide me with an escort." Hugh Elliott seemed on the point of speaking, but checked himself; then the question of a groom was discussed, and Lady Rawson said she wished she was not too old to ride, whereupon Elliott exclaimed: "But you are not," with a hearty sincerity that disposed her ladyship most favourably towards him. Soon after Miss Foster came in, full of the quantity of business she had done, and the wonderful bargains she had made; she was delighted to see Elliott, and they all sat down, pleased with each other, to enjoy some tea and sallyluns.

"I am sure I am so glad to make tea for you once more, Mr. Elliott," said Miss Foster, kindly, "it seems quite like old times."

"Thank you," he returned, smiling; "but *I* think it very unlike old times! No doubt Miss Digby considers it a pleasant change!"

"In many ways, yes," returned Madeline, colouring slightly. "The change of circumstance is pleasant, especially when friends remain unchanged."

"And how did you find dear grandmamma, Miss Foster?" asked Lady Rawson.

"Well, rather nervous," replied that lady, hesitatingly; "you see Miss Sharp insists on going to see her friends twice a year, and Mrs. Redman is quite alone, for Mrs. Comerford is gone to the sea-side with Johnny, so Mrs. Redman feels rather low, and somehow seems to blame me for it all; she says I destroyed all her comfort; I am really very sorry, but you know I could not go back."

"I should think not," cried Madeline; "you belong to me now, aunty! I have a vested right to her, have I not, Mr. Elliott?" turning to him with the bright sparkling smile that always beamed upon her face when peculiarly happy or successful.

"I imagine Miss Foster will not dispute it," returned Elliott, a sort of indulgent tenderness softening his habitual gravity.

"I can so well imagine the sort of conversation or monologue to which Mrs. Redman treated you," resumed Madeline; "confess the truth, were you not charmed to get away from the sound of her voice?"

"Well, not exactly."

"I should like to meet this grandmother of yours, Madeline," said Lady Rawson; "she must be a great character;" an expression of contempt flitted over Madeline's face for an instant.

"She is not amusing, dear Lady Rawson. She is simply a dull, selfish, avaricious old woman. She would bore you! Were

"The weaker half, certainly not," replied her ladyship.

"I don't believe it," said Madeline, earnestly. "Society could not hold together if your views were correct; and if they *are*, still *I* will not believe them."

"Well, do not, if they make you uncomfortable. But you are too nice for this Australian. Good night, dear Madeline. God bless you! for there *is* a Providence that shapes our ends." Lady Rawson pressed her hand, and departed.

When Madeline returned to the drawing-room, she found Miss Foster talking on her favourite topic, the north country and her relations there. Elliott was listening dreamily, but roused up when Madeline came in.

"How well Lady Rawson looks!" said Miss Foster.

"Yes," replied Madeline, "she has the eternal youth of a good, warm heart."

"She is handsome," said Elliott; "a fine, strong face. Well, Miss Digby, you have not asked the price of this horse. It is a bargain."

"What do you call a bargain?" asked Madeline.

"Sixty guineas."

"Sixty guineas! what a quantity of money, and all for myself. Do you know I do not think I will buy it."

"Well, the horse is worth it, if you really want one; and, I think, if you wish to part with him, you can always get your money back. Have him on trial for a week."

"Yes, that will be charming. I will see the riding-master, and make arrangements to-morrow."

"There is the address of the man who wants to sell the horse;" and Elliott handed Madeline a card with rather an air of washing his hands of the business. And Madeline took it silently. Laying it down beside her, she turned the conversation on their mutual acquaintance, the Downings, and then other topics suggested themselves. At last Elliott rose to say good night.

"And about this affair," said Madeline, showing the card, and smiling shyly. "I am afraid I am very troublesome, but really you must help me through. You know I never could write about it, or manage it myself."

"As you like," returned Elliott, in a grave, kindly tone. "I shall arrange the whole thing, and"—hesitating, the colour coming into his dark cheek—"if you would care, that is, if I could be useful to you in trying the horse—come down, and ride with you, I mean—I shall be very happy; that is, if the evening hours will suit you."

"I shall be greatly obliged," returned Madeline; "the people here are quite strange to me, and," looking up in his face, with a sudden frank gleam of confidence, "I know you." She had

going down to that stupid Isle of Wight. Do you know Lord Hexham always said I was like you. He was so surprised to hear about your being an heiress; you remember him, he was Colonel Ashurst? We used to see a great deal of him at Naples. He was so good to me."

"Yes, I remember him," said Madeline, dreamily, as she played with her ex-pupil's golden hair. "Is he still at Naples?"

"Oh no? he is in London; he will be here to-morrow night." And then Lady Agnes yawned, and exclaimed. "I am so tired; I must go to bed. Stay with me, dear Madeline, till I am in bed; I hate to be left alone."

Lady Templemore and Lady Elizabeth had gone to a musical party, and afterwards to a ball, so Lady Agnes had Madeline all to herself, much to her delight. Lady Agnes was a striking instance of the power of race. She was as thoroughly Irish as if no drop of the Grey blood had mingled with that of the Temples. Bright, loving, impulsive, she had long ago set up Madeline on the altar of her heart as her ideal woman, and very tenderly did her new-found relative return her affectionate regard. She was grieved to see how slight and delicate she looked; how fearfully exquisite her complexion, and how feverishly bright her eyes; and how, wearied out, she fell suddenly asleep—some loving words on her lips, and Madeline's hand in hers. Madeline sat thus for a long time, without the slightest movement, reviewing the tangled web of life around her. How little the smooth surface of society showed of the passion, the struggle, the agony, or the joy beneath! Who could imagine that a rich, popular, laughter-loving widow like Lady Rawson had a store of such memories as she had unfolded! And when she herself met Lord Hexham the following evening, with all the polished courtesy suited to their mutual position, who could dream that but for some mysterious influence, some instinctive womanly modesty, she might then have been his mistress, unworthy of associating with the fair young creature now sleeping peacefully, happy in holding her hand so closely clasped? Nothing showed Madeline so strongly the difference between her past and present as the feeling with which she now regarded Lord Hexham's audacious proposal. "What ruin it would have been!" she thought. "No fortune, no after success, would have redeemed me. How dared he think of it?" whispered conscience, "how was it that *you* entertained it?"

The ball was brilliant and well managed, and Lord Bracklyn danced the first quadrille with Madeline—Lord Templemore doing duty with some lady of high rank. A good deal of notice was bestowed upon Madeline, as the same basis of human nat-

"And you have inherited treasures of gold and silver since we last met," he continued. "I must congratulate you. I was very glad to hear of it."

"Thank you," said Madeline, quietly, and she passed on without another word.

Lord Hexham felt posed. Nothing could be more friendly and well-bred than her manner, yet it implied the death and burial of all warmer feeling. He was to have the excitement of a fresh chase, then! for what, he scarcely knew. He had no decided object in seeking out this girl about whom he had once been so bewitched, unless for a passing excitement.

So he strolled away, generally finding himself in the same room with Madeline, and bestowing his august notice, first on some lady of high rank or fashion, then on another, everywhere most flatteringly received; and Madeline saw it all, she was never alone, either Lady Agnes was nestling to her side, or she was in close and animated conversation with Lady Rawson, or Lady Templemore was saying a few confidential words as though she was a daughter of the house, and indiscriminate young guardsmen were being presented; and through all this she wore the same natural, easy expression. Lady Rawson, who looked remarkably well, as if life had been one blaze of sunshine, after a very few words, said quickly:

"So, Lord Hexham is here!"

"Yes," returned Madeline. "I wish he was not, he has rather spoiled the evening for me."

"You look perfectly well and composed."

"Yes, forewarned is forearmed. I knew he was coming."

"That was fortunate, I like to see you show your strength." Madeline smiled, but was silent, her eyes fell upon Lord Hexham; at that moment he was standing beside a lady who had just come in—a tall, haughty, noble-looking woman, who seemed too proud to have a glance for the general company, yet could smile sweetly upon him. "That is the Marchioness of Dunmore. The handsomest, proudest woman in the peerage," said Lady Rawson.

"They look well matched," thought Madeline, as she gazed with admiring eyes at Lord Hexham's splendid form and lordly air and then quietly measured him with Hugh Elliott. How brilliant and magnificent the former was in comparison! How every sort of success and distinction appeared to have been lavished on him. Rich, noble, winning, and handsome, with enough generosity and kindliness to make him loveable, what a wreath of goodly gifts! while Elliott, crushed by circumstances in early youth, had to fight with patient endurance and lonely fortitude, for a standing place, and was hardened in the incessant

than himself. Her heart beat: ah! why had he not been as true as he was charming!

"No, of course not," she returned, with a bright smile; "but I am tired, and would like to sit down."

"Madeline," said Lord Hexham, in a caressing tone, and pressing the hand that lay on his arm; it was quietly withdrawn, to lift her fan, which dropped at that moment: Lord Hexham picked it up quickly.

"Thank you," said Madeline, quietly, and continuing exactly in the same tone, neither piqued nor angry, or assuming dignity or coldness, but in a natural, almost friendly manner, "except to a few intimates, I am Miss Digby."

"Indeed," returned Lord Hexham, astonished beyond measure at the force and mental muscle of the young, slender, suddenly-enriched waif, who so unhesitatingly put him in his place. "I shall not require a second lesson," and in silence they looked for Lady Agnes, to whom Lord Hexham had much to say in a pleasant, almost fatherly manner, and ultimately took leave of Madeline with a profound bow, and a look more respectful than she had previously seen in his eyes.

CHAPTER XLI.

Not all the caressing entreaties of Lady Agnes could induce Madeline to prolong her visit. She had friends coming to stay with her, she said, and she must be at home to receive them. So with many promises to go and visit her young friend at their Ventnor villa, for which locality Lady Agnes was to start the following morning, Madeline bid her good-bye, and returned to Richmond in time for an early dinner, and to receive Mrs. Downing, who arrived to pass a few weeks with her old friend.

Miss Foster was somewhat fidgety and mysterious; and after the servants had retired, and the nursemaid taken Master Arthur Downing to play in the garden, exclaimed, "Now, my dear Madeline, that you have had your dinner, I must tell you of a very curious event, rather startling indeed—not that you need be frightened, still I would certainly tell Mr. Elliott or Mr. Payne."

"What is it?" asked Madeline, turning pale.

"Well, yesterday afternoon, just as I had finished trimming a straw bonnet, to wear about the roads, you know, Mrs. Downing, when Mary (the parlour-maid), came in and said there was a foreign gentleman wanted to see Miss Digby, and would not go away; would I see him? While I hesitated in walked Mr. Delille, in a dreadful state of excitement, and looking, to say

dwarfed into childhood again, until a few stolen glances showed him the exquisite proportions of the rounded, supple, womanly figure, and he perceived it was the absence of flowing drapery that took from her height.

"Let us go and see this famous horse," she said, "while we are waiting for Mr. Martin."

And accordingly Elliott accompanied her to the front door, where his groom was walking the two horses up and down. Both were fine creatures; but Madeline's the lighter and more graceful, a dark chestnut brown, with black legs, tail, and mane, square-cut nostrils, and a gentle, intelligent eye.

"What a beautiful creature! I shall make it a great pet. What is his name?" asked Madeline.

"Not a very romantic one," returned Elliott, smiling. "Brown Stout."

"Dreadful! If I buy him I shall drop the first part; Stout is not so bad."

But the ostler from the livery-stables now came up with a side-saddle, and Elliott was absorbed in seeing to the safety of the girths, the proper adjustment of the bridle, &c., with a silent care, that brought Madeline's softest, sweetest smile to lip and eye.

Before many minutes passed the riding-master, with the rest of his fair flock, appeared, and Elliott, not considering himself competent to mount a lady, gave way to the accomplished Mr Martin.

It was a lovely evening, and the equestrians thoroughly enjoyed their ride through the charming, smiling scenery of Richmond and Bushy Park.

Mr. Martin found himself relieved of all trouble as regarded Miss Digby. Her grave, dark cavalier, whose first-rate seat and hand rather surprised the suburban riding-master, was always close to her side, full of the most watchful care, and also the most uncompromising corrections.

It was a delightful ride, though somewhat silent and quiet, and when they returned Elliott just came in to say good-bye to Miss Foster and Mrs. Downing. Then an appointment was made for another evening, and Elliott departed, with a sort of glow, as of rekindling hope in his heart, which he tried in vain to reason down.

The current of Madeline's life seemed at this time to have found a smooth and pleasant channel, unexciting, but deliciously tranquil. Occasionally she went with Lady Templemore to some brilliant *fête* or assemblage; oftener she passed a day or two with Lady Rawson; but chiefly she enjoyed the graceful re-

would accompany me, I think I should like to explore the west of Ireland."

"I daresay it would be very fresh and pleasant. Why not try Norway? I fancy it is beyond the reach of excursionists. Are you and Miss Digby to hunt in couples?"

"I am so fond of Richmond," replied Madeline, "I do not think I shall leave it all the year."

"Ah! I suppose you return there to-morrow," said Lord Hexham carelessly, yet giving diligent heed to Lady Rawson's answer.

"No, she stays, because I have asked T., whom she was anxious to meet, to dinner—though you must be on your own resources all day, remember, mademoiselle, for I must go to the City." "Lady Rawson's carriage stops the way!" and in a few minutes they were driving towards —— gate.

"On the whole I think Lord Hexham a very exceptional man," said Lady Rawson, as they rolled easily onwards. "I am almost inclined to believe he has a heart."

"Yes, I think he has, and the skill to make the most of it," said Madeline.

"How? What do you mean?" asked Lady Rawson.

"The skill to show it pleasantly, and derive pleasure from it himself." Lady Rawson looked at her sharply, but made no reply.

The next day was showery, and cooler than any that had been experienced for some time. Lady Rawson had an early luncheon, and started to see her solicitor, and perform a large amount of business, which she said she had allowed to accumulate. Madeline rather enjoyed the rest and silence, after the excitement of the night before. Lady Rawson's principal rooms looked to the street, but a delightfully cool back drawing-room opened on a conservatory, full of fragrant plants and ferns, from whence came a softened light and fresh perfumed air, which created a delicious atmosphere, so Madeline sat down to the piano, to dream and sing, and while away her friend's absence in perfect quiet. It was not unlikely, she thought, that her old friend Mr. Fitzharris might call, and she wished to see him, and ask him to her house, or show him, in some way, that she did not forget his former partisanship.

When the door opened, therefore, she rose easily and smilingly, and was not a little startled by the announcement of "Lord Hexham."

She felt instantly that some kind of trial was before her—some struggle for which she strove to nerve herself. If so accomplished a cavalier could seem awkward, Lord Hexham did. on this his first *tête-à-tête* interview with Madeline, since the day

have seemed so quixotic to have raised an humble bread-winner to be your wife—your countess. Yet, oh! Lord Hexham, it would have been truer wisdom, for I did love you! It is a chance if you are ever so much loved again; even still I do not like to wound you or say harsh things to you; yet what a bitter cup of humiliation you made me drink, it has flavoured all life since! but why blame you, you acted only a common part—the laws of the society you move in forbid a *mésalliance*—only it is a pity that men such as you think that all things should exist for your gratification."

"I did not know you as I now do," said the earl, much moved, "I classed you with other women. Do not say that I embittered your life."

"No!" returned Madeline, "not altogether, for when in my lowest estate—another, not so great as you, but still much above me, and rich with wealth of his own hard earning, offered all to me, and somewhat healed the wounds you made."

"Ha!" cried Lord Hexham. "You love another—and I have lost you!" he breathed quick and deep.

"I refused him," continued Madeline, "because the shadow of my love for you made my heart cold even then."

"Ah! Madeline," said the earl, kneeling beside her, and passionately kissing her hand. "Look at me! forgive me! I have bitterly regretted my own folly. I have found all things void without you: my heart aches for you!—my fondest hope, my waking thought and sleeping dream, is—that you will let me read love in those sweet eyes, and hold you to my heart;" his rich voice faltered with passionate emotion, and he looked so thoroughly a girl's ideal chivalrous lover that Madeline's purpose faltered for a moment, her old yearning for his love came back in a sudden tide of tenderness or weakness. It was but for a moment, and then looking beyond and above him she conjured up Hugh Elliott's dark pale face and earnest truthful eyes, remembering the look and tone with which, when she had rejected him, he asked only to be of use to her, and feeling despite his silence and guarded reserve that she would turn his heart to stone if she were to accept another. No! this man had enough. She was not essential to him; her heart, her better-self turned to her true, though rugged, self-made lover, whose life she so much wished to beautify and soften; and Lord Hexham saw, by the distant outlook in her eyes, that she had escaped his influence.

"No, Lord Hexham," said Madeline, slowly and dreamily, and again withdrawing her hand. "It is gone by now—we can be nothing more to each other, not even friends—we feel too much for that, so let us part! Thank God we have no more serious cause for mutual reproach; for my part I heartily forgive you

panionship and exchange of thought, and the deepening interest which each successive meeting with Elliott developed, helped to enhance the beauties of Auburn Lodge. Then she was satisfied in having parted with Lord Hexham, and on the terms she did; she had left him the lasting impression that she was no toy for an idle moment, but his equal, so far as nature and petty prejudice will permit woman to be with man, and thus, her *amour propre* saved harmless, she thought of him indulgently. She had had the nearest approach to a quarrel with Lady Rawson that could occur, where one party was entirely pacific, for her astute friend quickly discovered, by a few dexterous queries, that the brilliant and fascinating earl had been rejected, and was excessively wroth. But Madeline was passive and dispirited, so the flame of Lady Rawson's anger died out for want of something to feed upon.

"Mr. O'Keefe called here yesterday," said Miss Foster, as she and Madeline were sitting together at the open window after their early dinner. Miss Foster never would understand that it was not an unwarrantable liberty to call him "The O'Keefe." "He sat a long time and made himself most agreeable; he told me a great deal about his family, and really it is very sad to think how badly treated they all have been."

"Have they?" said Madeline. "Who by?"

"Well, you see I am not very quick at understanding things, so I do not exactly know. I think by the English government, and the people who bought their property."

"I fancy they would have been still more badly treated if no one had bought it," returned Madeline, laughing.

"He mentioned M. Delille amongst other things," continued Miss Foster. "I said how much he had frightened me that day he called here—oh! more than two months ago—and how you had gone to Mr. Payne and Mr. John about him; but that we had never heard or seen anything of him since, and Mr. O'Keefe said he had been away in France and had given up some appointment in that great company your uncle was a director of, and indeed the company is given up too. But it seems M. Delille has been in London for some time and dangerously ill, with brain fever, or something dreadful; indeed Mr. O'Keefe was quite mysterious about him."

"I am very sorry he is ill," said Madeline; "I feel as if I had brought him into trouble. I wish——" Madeline's wish remained unspoken, for the servant entered and presented her with a letter, a large letter, directed in a mercantile hand.

"Any answer 'm?" asked the servant.

Madeline opened it. It was a few brief lines from Elliott, written on large blue office paper—he said—

"Some City men, however, can overlook the want of it, and dramatic difficulties, too," retorted Madeline.

"Well hit," said Lady Rawson, laughing good-humouredly, "I suppose I had better let a wilful woman have her way; certainly I have no power to stop you."

"No," said Madeline, taking her hand affectionately, "yet your opinion will always have weight in my eyes, though you cannot persuade me to accept wood, or straw, or composition of any kind, however well gilt, for the gold itself. Have these substitutes satisfied *you*, Lady Rawson?"

"Nay, if you can get true gold, for God's sake secure it," returned her ladyship; "meantime let us not go to war for an idea. I heartily hope that life may not prove a mistake to you as it has done to so many."

Lady Templemore also paid Madeline a short visit. It was to say good-bye, as she was going to join Lady Agnes at Ventnor, intending to remain a few weeks, as Lord Templemore wished to entertain some yachting celebrities during the expected regatta. Lady Templemore was much hurried, the chief object of her call was to arrange with Miss Digby her long promised visit to Lady Agnes, and it was finally agreed that Madeline should join them on the —th, which was nearly a fortnight off. She felt a strange reluctance to assent, yet had no tangible excuse to offer, and so Lady Templemore carried her point, and went away rejoicing.

The evening after this interview, Madeline and Miss Foster were sitting as usual in their favourite window, and after a few desultory remarks had glided into their favourite topic, conjectures and wonderings, "What could have become of Mr. Elliott?" when that gentleman was announced.

The moment Madeline's eyes met his, she felt, to use a common but expressive phrase, "that something had happened." He looked worn and haggard, yet there was an unusual fire in his glance and animation in his face. His voice, too, had a ring in it, unlike his ordinary quiet tone, as though the inner depths had been stirred, and all the imprisoned lightnings of the higher spirit let loose. Madeline rose to meet him with a glow on her cheek and a smile on her lips that spoke a warmer welcome than her words, and she noticed that he took her hand with a stronger, firmer grasp than he had ever bestowed on it before. His greeting to Miss Foster, too, was more openly, genially cordial than he was in the habit of bestowing.

"I hope I did not keep you waiting the other evening," he said, "I expected to the last that I should be able to come, and then found it impossible. Now, what do you say to a ride? the evening is delicious, not over warm, and by the time you are

elsewhere. This especial evening, however, all diffidence and coldness seemed to have been exorcised; yet there was no visible excitement in his manner—only he spoke out his thoughts, and took the lead in conversation. His eyes too frequently sought and met Madeline's, with an earnest, longing, penetrating glance, as if he were learning her face and thoughts by heart. She remembered that evening long! It seemed that, although full of love and admiration for her, he was resolved not to speak it; and, with a strange perversity, she sought, gently and distantly it is true, still sought, to draw forth the declaration she half longed for, half feared. It was a delicious dewy evening, and as they rode along, the springy tread of the horses imparting a delightful sense of elasticity, the sunlight sprinkling the grass beneath the trees with gold, and making the foliage transparent—sometimes talking of the beauty round them, or of Elliott's adventures in other lands—sometimes lapsing into expressive, sympathising silence, or exchanging a glance of sudden understanding—they tasted a few moments of that rare and exquisite happiness which life, here and there, can show—when ruder, coarser cares are hidden for a brief space—when the discordant tones which vex the spirit are hushed awhile, and the soul, thirsting for love and comprehension, pausing on the brink of what seems to be living waters, whispers to itself, "Now shall my longings be satisfied, and I shall never thirst again."

The evening was closing in when they rode through the park on their return. The fresh dewy air stole round throat and cheek like a caress, and the stillness of coming night sank down upon them with all its suggestive tenderness. Instinctively Elliott drew closer to his companion. She looked pale, very pale in the fading light; and her figure swayed to the movements of her horse with a languid grace; her long lashes drooped over her cheek, except when raised to answer some observation of Elliott's, and then she always turned so as to let him look into her eyes—and what liquid depths of quiet feeling he read there!—and still he spoke of things apart from her. He talked more than he had ever done before of his past life; but no word of love passed his lips, save that the inflexions of his voice bespoke intense controlled emotion. "Do you feel the night air chill?" he said suddenly, after a prolonged silence.

"No," said Madeline; "rather refreshing."

"Then let us stop here for a moment," he said, laying his hand upon her rein, and touching hers, "I want to learn this scene by heart; and I am reluctant to pass out from this paradise into the common world."

The spot where they stood was that which commands the fa-

I me and others. I have sufficient to pay all here in full done, I have little left, and therefore return to Australia; to see what I can make of this defaulter, partly because I I can start there best afresh. It is hard to have the toil ars annihilated at a blow—hard to give up hopes——," but, rrupting himself, "I must not whine over what is inevitable. n no worse off than many others; not so bad as some, for I re neither wife nor children. I had just got this news a day two before my appointment to ride with you, Miss Digby: determined immediately to wind up my affairs in London, and ound it impossible to get here in time that day, so I worked away to clear the wreck! My passage is taken—I sail from Southampton next week, taking the overland route to Ceylon, and so by steamer to Sydney."

He stopped abruptly, and walked once or twice up and down the room.

Madeline sat down on the sofa suddenly, as if stunned, and Miss Foster, with tears in her eyes, exclaimed, "Oh! my dear Mr. Elliott! how dreadful! how grieved I am! You, who were so good and kind!"

"Yes," said Madeline, eagerly, nervously, "You, who helped us at our greatest need—can I not—may I not—be of some use to you now?" and she blushed crimson.

Elliott shook his head, and stretched out his open hand with a gesture expressive of utter rejection. He looked so thoroughly resolved, so completely master of himself, and dictator of his own line of conduct, that Madeline dared not proceed; she therefore stopped abruptly, and stood, her clasped hands pressed to her bosom, her eyes full of entreaty—a picture of graceful submission. Elliott looked at her, and turned away with a contraction of lip and brow; then controlling himself, he said, smiling pleasantly, "Of course you are ready to give me the half of your fortune, because I was once of some slight service to you; but such romantic generosity is of little credit to the receiver, or indeed the giver. I did not intend to say all this. I only meant once more to have one or two hours of delight before I went away into a totally different life, and then to write properly suffer for it, for it is harder to *say* good-bye. Never-good-bye; but you see I am weaker than I thought, and very theless it must be done." He looked paler and darker than ever. As he took Miss Foster's hand, "Take care of yourself, cousin," he said kindly; "I shall return some day, and then, probably, Miss Digby will have a beautiful home of her own, and will spare you to keep house for me."

The blood seemed to rush back from Madeline's cheek to her heart, and fill it to bursting, as she listened to these words, by

undeserved a disaster. I will go away to bed. I have been over-tired and nervous, and fear I half frightened you, pray forgive me." And kissing her kindly, Madeline hastened to her room.

Here she sat long in deep thought, reviewing all the obstacles to her longing desire to help Elliott in some way, to prevent his leaving England. And her mingled delicacy and good sense showed her they were almost, if not altogether, insurmountable. If Elliott had been an old man, or a married man, the attempt would have been more feasible. But she well knew—and her cheek crimsoned as she thought of them, the observations that would be made—the motives that would be attributed to her. Then Elliott, if he knew the source from which aid came, would undoubtedly reject it. Still she could not relinquish some attempt towards this end, and there was only a week in which to accomplish it! That Elliott's feelings had changed towards herself she did not doubt. He had seen some one else probably when still sore and mortified by her rejection, and his heart was caught in the rebound; but even as her bosom heaved in bitter agony at the thought of having thrown aside what she now so much valued, at the idea of another being preferred before her, she nevertheless truly and warmly felt for the aggravation such a state of feeling would be to his grief and mortification.

Madeline suffered for a couple of hours all the torture of indecision; at last she resolved on a line of action, and then sank into a deep dreamless sleep.

When Mademoiselle Céline descended from her mistress's chamber next morning, she brought directions to the groom to order a carriage to be at the door at half-past nine, as Miss Digby wished to go into town.

At breakfast Madeline announced to Miss Foster, who looked unusually grave, that she was going into town to consult Mr. Payne about some matters of business. "I will tell you all about it, dear aunty, when I come back," she said, and Miss Foster was quite content and went about her household duties as usual—though frequently giving both sighs and thoughts to her admired and valued kinsman's misfortunes—while she cherished a kind of latent hope that Madeline, in whose resources and powers she had implicit confidence, had gone into town to devise some means to extricate him from his troubles.

But Madeline returned in about three hours with a very sad, settled expression. She tasted very little dinner, and when the servants had left, she held out her hand to Miss Foster, and letting it lie in her friend's clasp, said, with her own peculiar noble frankness—"My heart is very low, aunty! No doubt you have guessed what took me into town! I went to consult

"Ah!" said Madeline, laughing, as they drove away,
rigid poetical justice is being inflicted in that house! how thor
oughly is Miss Sharp avenging your wrongs, and how certainly
the bully and the coward are united in character. Miss Sharp
will do Mrs. Redman good by constantly reminding her that she
cannot have things always her own way."

When the friends reached home, the smart parlour-maid in-
formed them that "the French gentleman as was here once be-
fore had called early, just after missis and Miss Foster had gone,
and seemed so vexed at missing them, that he forgot his Eng-
lish, so he called Céline, who had a long talk with him."
Céline was sent for, and reported that "M. Delille, a distin-
guished gentleman, though a little wrong-headed about madem-
oiselle, had been desolated to learn that all the world had
gone out. He said much in his excitement, and wished to fix
day and hour when he could see mademoiselle, and that she
(Céline) had informed him that was impossible, as Mademoiselle
Digby left town directly for Lord Templemore's villa?"

"Why did you tell him?" said Madeline, a little uneasily.

"I hope you did not say what day we were to leave."

"But no, certainly not! Céline had told him to-morrow
Yes, she was sure she mentioned to-morrow."

"Why did you object to M. Delille knowing when you le
town?" asked Miss Foster.

"I can scarce tell, an undefinable, indescribable fear, eve
now, doubting Céline (for I am certain she told him the re
day). I will write to Lady Templemore, and ask her to let
go down on Friday instead of Thursday. I cannot account
my fear of that man, except that Hugh—I mean Mr. Elliott
infected me."

CHAPTER XLIV.

It was a bright warm morning that memorable Friday. Ma
line had decided on travelling by the 3.10 express to Southa
ton, as it would give her time to drive into town after lunch
Mademoiselle Céline occupied an inside place, but there
little or no conversation between her and her mistress; ind
Madeline was unusually silent and depressed.

They stopped on the way to make some trifling purchase
found themselves later than they expected when they arriv
the Waterloo Station. However, Céline so bestirred hers
specting luggage, &c., that Madeline found all ready
time she had taken the tickets. They were obliged to tak
places in a carriage almost at the end of the train, as al
first attached were full.

with a sort of laboured composure, "I am fortunate at last to secure an interview with you."

"I did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing you," returned Madeline, with surprising self-command, seeing it was necessary to soothe him; and, rightly judging that she was in danger of some kind, felt that time was everything.

"We do not always readily avoid that which is a pleasure," returned Delille, gloomily; "and you have steadily avoided me for months."

"Far from it," said Madeline, readily. "I happened twice to be absent when you called; but I have never avoided you."

"Ah, ah! would I could believe thee, little traitress!" said the Frenchman, glaring upon her with an appalling mixture of hatred and admiration.

"Monsieur is not polite," returned Madeline, striving hard for composure while her soul sank within her.

"No, Madeline; politeness and *bienséance* and social observance, all are gone out of my life! Thou hast destroyed me, fair-haired demon that thou art!"

"Nay, M. Delille, I am sure you are under some wrong impression, or speak in jest. I have never injured you! Even now, if I have unconsciously worked you any harm, tell me how I can repair the evil, and I will!"

"You will!" shouted Delille, seizing her hands with painful force. "Then you will be mine! -You will be my wife! You will come direct to the altar when the train stops; she will be the witness"—pointing to Céline; "and then, when we arrive in Paris, my mother will ask the Archbishop to perform the ceremony according to her faith, and the Empress will come! Say, wilt thou thus repair the ruin thou hast wrought?" He spoke with the wildest vehemence, and so rapidly, as to be almost unintelligible.

"Yes, certainly;" returned Madeline, fighting against the faintness of horror that nearly deprived her of voice and power.

"You will? you will?" shouted the unfortunate Delille, "Then heaven opens! Earth is gone past—see, we fly through the air—and the baffled devil is lurking below——" He continued to rave and pour forth a torrent of incoherent rhapsodies to his terrified listeners. Mademoiselle Céline rather injudiciously tried to soothe him by expostulations, and being told sternly to hold her tongue, sat down in mute fear; while the excited Delille sang wild discordant snatches of triumph. Madeline, not daring to look at her own watch, and thinking the awful hour must be nigh exhausted, called in a low tone to Céline, "For God's sake, how goes the time?" But, low though she spoke, and Delille seemed absorbed in his own uproar.

was now for Elliott, for him whom she thought she had lost for ever! Foot to foot, eye to eye, Delille and Elliott strained one against the other—a fearful silence replaced the wild confusion that had reigned before. Elliott's dark face was turned to Madeline, and bent with an expression of locked resolution on Delille. The large beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, as they swayed to and fro.

The women with tacit consent hung on Delille's arm, to make some diversion in their champion's favour; and still the train sped on. Oh! what leaden moments! What an unspeakable age since Elliott's figure had darkened the doorway! At last, dare she believe it? the speed relaxed! Yes; it could not be fancy. There! she saw the commencement of some boarding—slower yet! Here is the platform—the porters crowding at the renewed shrieks of Céline. They stop; there is a confusion, a number of men drag Delille from the carriage, and away out of sight. Passengers alight: every one asks every one else what is the matter. The station-master sends for the inspector of police; and Elliott, lifting Madeline out, feels her arms with unceremonious haste and anxiety, exclaiming, "Are you safe; are you uninjured?"

"For God's sake," she said faintly, "see that unfortunate man is taken care of!" then everything seemed to fade away in a sort of deadly darkness, and she heard no more.

When Madeline came to herself, she was lying on a horse-hair covered settee, in the little waiting-room, and she was conscious of a delightful darkness and quiet. "Thank God," said a voice she knew well, "she opens her eyes."

"Yes, I am better," said Madeline, still faint and dizzy, "where is Céline?"

"Your maid?" asked a respectable-looking sympathetic female, "she is greatly upset, and was in such hysterics we had her removed to the station-master's room lest she should disturb you. When you are able, the gentleman says he would like to speak to you."

"The gentleman who saved me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"In a moment," replied Madeline, just leaning back to think for an instant of the awful peril through which she had passed, and that she owed her life to Hugh Elliott; but above all, the idea most vivid to her, was that he had not gone yet! that he was still near, and the sound that rang on her over and over again, but never too often, was the tone of passion, forced as it were from the depths of his heart, with which he had cried "Madeline darling."

prosaically. "And if you feel equal to it, I wish, my lo
would get up and dress, for he says he would like to shak
hands with you before he goes, and he must take an early train
to save his passage. He was going to embark at Southampton
you know, and that's the way he happened providentially to be
in the next carriage to you! There was no one in it but himself,
and if you had not been so far from the engine he might never
have heard Céline scream. When he thought he heard a scream
he looked out and saw the next carriage-door swinging open, so
he thought something must be wrong, and as he always carries a
railway key, he let himself out. How your door came to be un-
locked he can't understand; but I had better send Céline to you."
"Yes, yes!" said Madeline, who had risen while Miss Foster
spoke. "I tremble, I cannot hold anything. Go, dear aunty,
say I will be down directly." "Only one hour, perhaps less,"
she thought, as Miss Foster left the room, "to fix my future, and
it rests with myself! How shall I act! what can I do?"
Céline was shocked to see how unnerved her mistress was, a
nothing save the recollection of Elliott's stern injunctions ke
her from making a scene and demanding pardon for her unhap
treachery.

At last the toilette was accomplished, and leaning on M
Foster's arm Madeline descended to a small sitting-room on
ground floor, with a couple of windows looking on a gard
It was furnished stiffly and coldly, after the fashion of hot
with a large array of glasses and decanters on a heavy sidebo
It boasted an easy chair, however, which was placed near
window, and in this Miss Foster deposited her charge. "I
tell Mr. Elliott you can see him," she said, and left the roo
When Hugh entered, a few minutes after, Madeline was
reclining in the large chair. She wore a white muslin mor
dress very thin, and floating in full folds, fastened with
ribbons, and a violet band tying back her golden hair.
looked deadly pale; her hand trembled almost painfully as
in Elliott's; she could scarce command her voice, and her
frame felt weak and helpless from her eager nervous anx
stop the fatal flight of time to prolong this important int
yet she felt bound as by a chain. She did not attempt
but let Elliott take her hand while she lifted up her eyes
as if even that were an effort. Elliott was evidently r
start by the next train; he had his travelling bag slung
shoulder, and only laid aside his hat as he entered.
terribly unhinged," he said anxiously, looking at her
as he drew a chair beside her. "Why you are worse
degrees than when you came over here last night.
ought to have medical advice."

She made no reply, nor was reply needed! The very abandonment with which her supple figure leant against his was more eloquent of love than the best chosen sentence.

"But Madeline," said Elliott, at last holding himself slightly back to look into her eyes. "How? when did you learn to love me?"

"From the hour I refused you," said Madeline, with a long deep sigh of relief and content.

"Ah!" cried Elliott, almost playfully, "you have to atone to me for many a despairing moment."

A knock at the door brought the lovers back to earth. "Come in," said Elliott, savagely.

Enter boots: "Just in time to catch the 12.30 train, sir."

"Oh, thank you! never mind! shan't go by that train."

"All right, sir; only as you was so particular not to miss," and boots vanished.

"I can afford to wait another steamer," said Elliott, with one of those rare sweet smiles which only rise from a satisfied heart, and seating himself by Madeline possessed himself of a little hand. "And we must arrange everything before I sail."

"If you must sail," returned Madeline, laying another little hand on his so as to imprison the long brown fingers—while the colour rose on her cheek and the old light came back to her eyes—"I must go with you! Ah! Hugh, remember how nearly we have lost each other from a mere mistake, a little overstrained feeling—let us run no risks again!"

There is little more to say. The joy and triumph of Miss Foster can be easily imagined. The cool disdain of Lady Templemore, the grumblings of Mrs. Redman, the good-natured submission of Lady Rawson.

Mr. Elliott did not return to Australia.

Although the bulk of Madeline's fortune was settled on herself, a certain portion was left, as Mr. Payne contemptuously phrased it, "to her husband to make ducks and drakes of. His ducks and drakes, however, proved such domestic fowls that they always returned home, and increased and multiplied in a most satisfactory fashion. Mrs. John was greatly disgusted with the wedding, which she designated a shy affair, with only one bridesmaid—"though, to be sure, she was an earl's daughter."

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